

NONPROFIT WEBSITES

KILLER NONPROFIT WEBSITE CONTENT STRATEGY

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ADVANCE AND MAINTAIN A NONPROFIT WEBSITE THAT
ENGAGES DONORS, MEMBERS, AND VOLUNTEERS.

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on downloading the Killer Nonprofit Website Content Strategy!

This guide was created specifically for nonprofit organizations that are seeking to advance and maintain their current website more effectively and efficiently. The bottom line is that if you are reading this, you want your nonprofit website to do MORE for you with LESS effort. But, most importantly, the strategy is designed to help you to consistently build a more effective, intentional web presence than ever before.

The strategy is divided into easy-to-follow steps that anyone can use. However, we recommend involving senior leadership in the planning stages of this strategy in order to actively collaborate and ensure that all of the needs of your nonprofit organizations are addressed. Then, you can assign a team to execute the strategy from that point forward, working with creative professionals to do anything that they do not have the skills, knowledge, or time to complete.

We don't want to waste your time with tons of introductory content, so let's get started right away.

If you find yourself lost or feel that you need help to create the blueprint for your organization's web presence, skip to the information in the last section.

Let's begin.

TACTIC 1: SURVEY YOUR WEBSITE

The first step in advancing your nonprofit website content and growing your presence is to assess the content you currently have. Taking a survey of your website is an important first step toward understanding what growth really looks like. This section assumes that you have built your website properly, using our Nonprofit Website Planning Guide or the help of a marketing professional to put everything in place that your nonprofit needs to be successful.

Make a few lists, splitting your website pages into a few categories:

1. **Static Content** – Pages that contain information that does not change often.
2. **Dynamic Content** – Pages and information that should be updated often.
3. **Shareable Content** – Pages that contain information that can be shared on a regular basis.
4. **Media Content** – Pages that contain audio and video content that needs to be updated and kept fresh.
5. **E-mail Update Content** – Pages that contain information that needs to be summarized and sent by e-mail to your mailing list.

In surveying your website, you may find that you do not have one of the categories of content listed above.

At this time, you may want to assess whether or not sections or pages of your website need to be added in order to improve your current website. You may also find that your website has the opposite problem – too much of one type of content.

Make your adjustments with the help of your marketing and design team and finalize your lists. Some pages may appear in more than one category as they

contain different elements that apply to those categories.

TACTIC 1 ACTIVITY – ASSESS YOUR WEBSITE

List the static pages of your website.

List the dynamic pages of your website.

List the pages of your website containing shareable content.

[illegible]

List the pages of your website that contain audio or video content.

[illegible]

List the pages of your website that contain potential content for e-mail updates.

[illegible]

TACTIC 2: PERFECT STATIC CONTENT

The next step in developing your killer website content strategy is to look at the list of pages you categorized as containing content that will not be changing often, called **static content**. Read that content one page at a time and assess whether or not the text, images and media you chose are the very best possible ways to communicate the points you are trying to make to your audience.

AN EXAMPLE OF STATIC CONTENT OPTIMIZATION

A great example of static content is the information contained in your About Us page. Many organizations use very dry, almost clinical language to communicate who they are, presenting the least appealing description of their culture, mission, vision and personality possible.

Instead, these organizations should rewrite their content to be passionate, inspiring and full of hyperbole. Be longwinded and excited. Use images and media to accompany your written text. Tell the story that people want to hear in order to attract like minds and hearts to your cause and specific approach to meeting the needs you represent.

FORGET YOURSELF. REMEMBER YOUR AUDIENCE.

The mistake many nonprofit leaders make when preparing materials and building their web presence is that they create things that they appreciate instead of what their core audience would be inspired by. Design decisions based on appearances and size take priority over clearly communicating a message to the community they exist to serve.

The problem is that your nonprofit organization is not the hero of its stories. The ones it benefits are. Their needs and desires come before yours. In fact, your

nonprofit does not exist without the existence of those needs. Why not make those items the main focus of your presentation?

For the purposes of this strategy, the core people you exist to serve are your **clients**. These are not necessarily donors. They are not necessarily volunteers either. They are the people whose needs you are fulfilling by doing what you do.

Answer these questions:

- Who is your audience?
- What are their needs, internally and externally?
- Why are you empathetic to their needs?
- How are you qualified to serve them?
- What is your approach and plan to meet their needs?
- What action(s) do they need to receive that service?
- What is the intended outcome of them connecting with you?
- What will potentially happen if they do not?

All of these questions are important to formulating your presentation to your community. But, it's also an important exercise to go through for donors and volunteers.

USE GREAT VISUALS AND MEDIA

Create written content is best accompanied by great visuals that help to further the narrative. Don't be fooled – people DO read in this modern age. But, they also expect to be stimulated by visuals, images and even media content that will help to further your presentation.

For images, use professional pictures when possible. You can hire a professional photographer to document your events and activities. You can also use stock

photography that aids in communicating your message. Using low quality pictures is generally only acceptable if you are posting event pictures from attendees or first person images from staff members intended to be shared on social media. Also, be careful with using too many stock images that appear posed or outside of your target demographic.

Static content is extremely important for nonprofits because of the fact that it rarely changes. It becomes a reliable reference for donors, members, volunteers and your target audience. Treat your static content with care, knowing that it will probably be months or even years before you change it again. A great investment toward making sure it is the very best possible will provide you with multiple times the return that poorly written content will provide.

TACTIC 2 ACTIVITY – DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

Who is your audience?

What are their needs, internally and externally?

Why are you empathetic to their needs?

How are you qualified to serve them?

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What is your approach and plan to meet their needs?

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What is the intended outcome of them connecting with you?

TACTIC 3: SCHEDULE DYNAMIC CONTENT

Next, pull out your list of pages that contain regularly changing content, also known as **dynamic content**. Dynamic content is important to a nonprofit website because it keeps the percentage of your audience that returns to your website for timely content informed.

Let me take a quick moment to clarify something I hear quite a bit from nonprofit leaders. You do not need to “keep your website fresh” to attract visitors. In fact, nothing you do on your website attracts visitors at all. Your content is designed to ENGAGE visitors when they come to your website AFTER they have been attracted to it by advertising, referral, or stumbling on your website somehow. Dynamic content allows for new and returning visitors to find (1) updates about the latest and newest things your organization is doing and (2) the precise information they came looking for, such as event details, driving directions and contact information.

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DYNAMIC CONTENT IS BEST POWERED BY SYSTEMS.

One approach to placing dynamic content on your website is to just add text, graphics and links to a page, and to just change that information on a regular basis. That process can be very manual and oftentimes leads to a fragmentation of your web content. You also lose your historical updates, so just as search engines find the information, it’s gone forever.

The best approach for dynamic content is to use specialized applications that allow you to add your updates and automatically update the site wherever necessary. For example, you can have an area of your website that contains a running list of your press releases. With the right systems, you can add the newest press release to the software and in the blink of an eye, a summary of your newest press release is added to your homepage with a link to the full

version and the entire press release is added to a running archive for visitors to refer back to.

Likewise, calendaring systems can help to publish event information, update your homepage with promotional entries, and facilitate online registration for attendees and volunteers with the click of a button. These systems are different for every platform, so you will want to look for a platform that supports dynamic applications and integrate fully into your website.

BLOGS CAN BE USED FOR MORE THAN JUST BABBLING.

One of the most popular systems to power dynamic content is a blog. Since there are different definitions we see floating out there, we'd like to define what a blog is for the sake of this strategy.

A blog is a collection of articles. Articles are entries with any type of content the blog system will support. So, a blog can be a press release archive, a news and updates feed, an editorial column, and even a media library. You decide how you want to use it.

Make use of blog functionality for anything that is updated regularly and can make use of a running archive of past entries. This is excellent for public relations and for building a library of content that the search engines can index.

Blog entries are also extremely shareable and usually support comments from visitors. So, there is a clear advantage to using them to power your website whenever possible. Add your entries and let your website update itself.

ALWAYS PUBLISH TO YOUR WEBSITE FIRST.

One mistake we see nonprofits make every day is to prioritize publishing on social media over their own website. So, they create Facebook events and then forget to add the events to their website calendars. Have you been guilty of that?

The reason this usually happens is because the webmaster or marketing team has not made the conscious decision to always update the website first, then share the calendar entry, or use the work they do on the site to create an event entry in another service. This creates a disjointed presence. Remember that your website is your **headquarters** and every other site and service is an **outpost**. Always make sure that your headquarters has the right information before syndicating or feeding the information to the outposts.

But, the main secret to ensuring that your website doesn't quickly become a wasteland of three-year-old content is to minimize the information that must be updated regularly. Then, focus on quality content and making sure that you provide as much information as possible for the updates you do make.

Develop a rhythm and consistency in what you do. Always update your content the same way to develop muscle memory and efficiencies that will help you to get in and out fast. After all, unless you nonprofit exists simply to spend its time publishing information on a website, you've got more important things to do, lives to save, and people to help.

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TACTIC 3 ACTIVITY – DEFINE APPS FOR DYNAMIC CONTENT

If you could dream up any type of system or functionality that your website could have other than just displaying content, what would it be? Examples are calendar systems, blogs, searchable sermon archives, etc.

TACTIC 4: PLAN SOCIAL SHARING & SYNDICATION

Now that the website content itself has been addressed, let's touch on ways to prepare for distributing that information beyond your website. We cover this in detail in our Nonprofit Internet Marketing Manual. But, in this strategy, we will make decisions that will identify content that can be shared and syndicated as well as prepare it properly for distribution throughout social media and syndication services.

Shareable content is content that provides stand-alone value and can be easily shared as a link on any number of social media sites, e-mail and bookmark services. For example, if you have a blog entry or page that is titled, "5 Ways to Feed the Poor In Your Community," your article can be easily shared and reshared by people interested in or advocating for the homeless population.

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You also want to scrutinize the value the content has for attracting your specific target audience, not just a general audience. Writing a blog about five fun gifts to give for Christmas might be fun and shareable, but does it really attract the kind of traffic to your website you are looking for? Also, remember to find images without text on them to use for your social sharing of articles and pages. Images can play a powerful role in receiving clicks from the right people. Choose the right titles, write a brief summary, and add the words "read more" along with a link to the page or entry on your website. This ensures that you have a teaser that will lead people to click and visit your website as well as sharing it with their friends and on their pages.

SYNDICATED CONTENT

Syndication is a way of getting content you author out to websites that collect content from all sorts of websites and then present them together to their

audience. The main ways of syndicating content is to use an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and submit your content to websites that accept submissions. In order to prepare for syndication, you want to be sure that your blogging technology supports RSS feeds and that you create an offline version of your post in Word for easy submission to the websites you choose to submit to.

TACTIC 4 ACTIVITY – PLAN YOUR CONTENT SHARING & SYNDICATION

Make a list of the websites you want to share and syndicate your shareable website content to.

[illegible]

TACTIC 5: DETERMINE WRITTEN CONTENT, PHOTOGRAPHY & MEDIA SOURCES

Once the continual improvement plan is created for the content areas and pages of your website, it's time to decide where your new content is going to come from. Content generally falls into three major categories:

1. Written content
2. Photography, images and graphics
3. Audio and video media

Each of these areas requires different disciplines and, potentially, different sources. Planning your sources for quality content is an important part of ensuring that you will have it when you need it, as fast as you need it, and with the quality that your website deserves.

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There is an emphasis I am making here: Do not wait until you need content in order to figure out where to get it. Fast approaching deadlines, last minute details, and a crazy nonprofit staffer workload will prevent you from doing the best job possible every time. Find your sources and plan at least two weeks ahead for production of your content. This will make provision for proofing and revising if necessary.

WRITTEN CONTENT

One thing we have learned over the many years of helping people build, advance and market their message is that not everyone is a writer. Some people are absolutely terrified at the thought of having to write something down that represents what they have to say to the entire world.

You have three choices when it comes to obtaining good quality written content for your website:

1. Write the content yourself if you are good at it.
2. Find a staff member or volunteer who loves to write.
3. Hire a copywriter who understands the language of your audience.

There are a few key thoughts in those three suggestions. First, you will only be successful at writing your own content if you are good at it and love to express yourself through writing. But, if you absolutely hate to write or are not particularly great at writing, this task will be too much of a chore for you to succeed.

The second option also only works if your staffer or volunteer is good at writing and loves to do it. If not, you will find yourself chasing after them, missed deadline after missed deadline. It might work for the first few updates. But, very quickly, they will start procrastinating. Some will actually leave rather than to face the thought of meeting a writing deadline. Apparently, it reminds them too much of high school essays.

The third option is also viable, but only if the professional writer is familiar with the language and culture of your audience. Understanding the important concerns that your organization is addressing is critical for good copywriting. Be careful with what is known in the industry as an SME. That stands for a “Subject Matter Expert.” SMEs are good for factual information and do tend to understand an industry as a whole. But, once again, without the proper sensitivity to the concerns of your audience and the dynamics of your missions, SMEs can make your content seem very generic. In many cases, they actually use the same content for multiple clients and simply replace the name.

The bottom line is that you need to identify someone who loves to write and is good at it. This way, the task is simple for them. They can write clearly and passionately, speaking to your website visitors like friends and articulating your vision in a way that gets the most convincing points across and pushes them into

whatever action you are attempting to get them to take.

PHOTOGRAPHY, IMAGES AND GRAPHICS

Quality images are also important for projecting a good image and attracting constituents, especially major donors. The photography on your website does not have to look professional, but it does have to be well captured. Grainy, blurry camera phone images just won't do the trick. Stock images should be appropriate and subtle, not too commercial and obvious. Custom graphics should be well-designed and should contribute to the website's narrative.

For photography, your options are:

- Invest in a camera to do it yourself.
- Use a staffer or volunteer who is familiar with photography.
- Hire a professional who can deliver beautiful images.

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Hiring professionals is usually the easiest thing to do, but it will take time to receive the pictures due to the editing process. However, they will usually yield the highest quality photographs possible. Assigning the task to a staffer or volunteer who is familiar with taking quality photographs provides you with a second option. However, this could prove problematic if you lose that person from your team.

Purchasing a prosumer level camera is also a viable option. I recommend purchasing a Canon Digital Rebel or a 7D, if budget allows. Both cameras can be purchased on Amazon for less than \$1,000 in a bundled kit that includes lenses, protective carrying equipment and more. They provide high quality JPG images and you can learn the fundamentals of using them rather quickly.

For stock images and graphics, we recommend one company hands down. Shutterstock.com makes it affordable for organizations of any size to purchase stock imagery and graphics on the website for a flat monthly fee or per image fee.

iStockphoto is another option if Shutterstock.com's options are too pricey for your organization.

Your options for custom graphics are the same as photography. Unless you or someone on your team is a graphics wizard, your best option is usually to hire someone to create custom graphics for you as needed. Finding the right vendor who can reliably create what you need for an affordable price is important.

AUDIO & VIDEO MEDIA

Modern websites can support many types of presentation formats. Audio and video content can work to enhance your website, making visiting it a more personalized and emotional experience. There are four steps to using audio and video content on your website:

1. Capturing/recording the audio/video footage.
2. Editing the media into a final product.
3. Uploading the finished media to a media service.
4. Embedding the media into your website.

Capturing your audio and video material in this day and age is simple. Experiment with different equipment to find your style and voice. Some organizations simply record with cell phones, promoting a gritty, fast-moving culture. Others insist on well-produced recordings and use professional prosumer equipment to do so. Most decide on a mixture of ways to capture and record their media content depending on the effect they want the media to have.

Editing your media is usually the most time-consuming part. Rarely do you capture exactly what you want without the need for editing the media, even if just to clip the beginning and ending. You can use video and audio editing software, such as Adobe Premier, to create clean, professional-looking presentations. But you can also use inexpensive software, like Camtasia Studio, to

easily create video. However, be aware that you will need to learn the software you choose to use in order to be effective.

Once you've created a final media product, you will need to upload your media to a service that will properly and affordably store your audio and video content while giving you adequate options to embed it into your website. Three services I recommend to all clients are:

- Highest quality video without ads - Vimeo.Com
- Decent quality video with the possibility of ads - YouTube.Com
- High quality audio-only content - SoundCloud.Com

Each of these services provide you with a way to embed the clips into your website. Usually, they provide you with HTML code that you can easily copy and paste onto a page or section of your website. Once you save the code, your media content shows up in that spot.

By creating quality content that focuses on informing and calling people to action, your website will always produce the best results possible, converting visitors into members, donors, volunteers, board members, team members, and even clients to assist.

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A QUICK WORD ABOUT COPYRIGHTS

We receive questions every day from nonprofit leaders asking how to tell if an image, media clip, and even written content is copywritten. The simple answer to this question is as follows: if you did not create the content, no matter what type it is, you do not own the copyright. Someone else does. According to the laws in most countries, using someone else's work can cost you – sometimes greatly. Around 2005, Getty Images started sending invoices to businesses and nonprofits using their clients' images on their websites and printed materials. We had one client who had copied and pasted 10 pictures from the website of Getty Images, and was charged \$10,000 per year they used the 10 images.

Be sure to always get permission from the creator of the content you want to use if you did not write it. The safest way to go is to create your own content or pay a licensing agency for usage of those creations. For example, we use Shutterstock.com for all of our stock images.

TACTIC 4 ACTIVITY – LIST YOUR CONTENT SOURCES

What sources will you use for original written content?

What sources will you use for licensed photography?

What sources will you use for licensed graphics?

What sources will you use for licensed audio content?

What sources will you use for licensed video content?

Who is putting all this content on the website for you?

TACTIC 6: MARKET YOUR MESSAGE

We are not going to spend tons of time on marketing since we cover this extensively in our Nonprofit Internet Marketing Manual. However, these are the main tactics that you will need to plan for in order to promote your website and drive targeted visitors to it.

1. **Search engine optimization:** The art and science of predicting the changes to your website necessary to improve your ranking in specific search phrases you are targeting.
2. **Pay-per-click advertising:** The system of advertising in online networks and search engines that allows you to bid for keywords and only pay if someone clicks on your advertisement.
3. **Social media marketing:** The development of your brand throughout the communities you are targeting in order to establish a voice, announce your events, and report on your wins.
4. **E-mail marketing:** Sending regular offers, announcements and updates to one or more opt-in list of e-mail subscribers and measuring the results.
5. **Conversion optimization:** Making changes to your pages that increase the engagement level and percentage of visitors to your website, specially measured by the calls to action to which they respond.

Although there are many more internet marketing tactics that you can apply, these will form the cornerstone of your message marketing strategy.

TACTIC 6 ACTIVITY – LIST YOUR MARKETING METHODS

Make a list below of the marketing methods you want to learn more about and potentially try from the list above or other methods you have heard about.

TACTIC 7: SCHEDULE E-MAIL UPDATES

In spite of what many think, e-mail marketing is still the cornerstone of all internet-related communication from your website. In order to leverage the content you are updating on a regular basis, you need to have a way of announcing those changes to a group of subscribers who have requested it.

The objective of any e-mail update you send to a predefined list should be to drive traffic to specific places on your website where they can learn more and/or take action. We will never call these updates “newsletters.” They are much more timely and concise than any newsletter. Your updates contain a summary of all important and timely information added to the website since the last time you sent to your list.

PLANNING YOUR E-MAIL UPDATES

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The first step to creating your e-mail updates is to plan the precise content you will be including in it. Remember, what you include will only be summary information with links to more information on your website. Here are some practical examples of the type of content to include in your e-mail updates:

- Next three upcoming events
- Latest news
- Latest blog entries
- Introductory from the executive director
- Featured picture from your online photo album
- Buttons to areas of your website, like online giving

These are just a few of many possible items that can be included and arranged in your e-mail updates.

SETTING UP YOUR E-MAIL TEMPLATE

The next step is to design and lay out your e-mail updates ahead of time. Once again, the worst use of technology is to wait until the last minute and expect everything to just work as planned. Design your e-mail update graphic template to look similar to your website. Use the same branding elements and colors. You can even create a menu at the top to lead readers to different major areas of your website directly from your e-mail message.

You will also want to designate which areas will always contain each component of your e-mail update. For example, you may want a one-column e-mail that always starts with an introduction, followed by the next upcoming event, followed by the latest blog entry, and ending with a donor appeal. The possibilities are endless, but the main objective is to bring consistency to your communication in terms of branding as well as content.

This will cause your subscribers to anticipate where information will be when they receive your e-mail updates, and learn to scan them for the value they want to receive from you. This might seem like information will be skipped or ignored. But, what it actually does is increase targeted clicks to your website that are ready to perform the action their own needs and wants led them to. This leads to higher click-through rates, higher engagement, higher conversion, and less wasted time.

It also helps you to focus on what you want them to do when they receive your updates and how to best guide them into the desired actions and outcomes.

We cover more about using e-mail updates as a marketing strategy in our Nonprofit Internet Marketing Manual. In that guide, we actually go through the process of showing you how to design your e-mail template properly as well as organize and graphically structure the way your e-mail content will look and function. Feel free to download the Nonprofit Internet Marketing Checklist at

<http://www.nonprofitwebsites.com> to get more details about obtaining the full guide.

TACTIC 7 ACTIVITY – WHY E-MAIL UPDATES?

Please write down all of the reasons why you believe sending out periodic e-mails to your lists is important and exactly what information you intend to send them on a regular basis.

[illegible]

TACTIC 8: MEASURE RESULTS

The last portion of your killer nonprofit website strategy involves measuring your results. While other guides, books and consultants might take you to your web statistics to count how many hits you are receiving, I will spare you the countless hours of poring through those reports and tell you exactly what you need to measure.

Remember what you stated as your goals for website visitor engagement earlier? That determines what you will need to measure. If your goal is to collect more names to solicit for donations, your measurement is how many names you collected. If your goal is to have more attendees to your meetings and events, the measurement is the number of attendees. It's really that simple. But, it doesn't end there.

Your stats and auxiliary data are what EXPLAIN your results or lack thereof. For example, if you are only getting 10 people to your website a month, you can't complain that you don't have donations pouring in. Similarly, if you are only spending \$25 a month in pay-per-click advertising, you can't complain that new volunteers aren't signing up in droves.

What you want to build is:

1. A reasonable expectation of what you want to see.
2. A reasonable plan of execution to produce that result.
3. A reasonable amount of effort, time, and/or money to execute that plan.
4. A reasonable amount of knowledge and expertise to make all this happen.

With the right reporting and adjustments, your website will grow to become a powerful part of your expanding nonprofit, helping you to get your message out and increase donors, volunteers, members and clients like never before.

TACTIC 8 ACTIVITY – WHAT IS REASONABLE?

What is a reasonable expectation of what you want to see?

What is a reasonable plan of execution to produce that result?

What is a reasonable amount of effort, time and/or money to execute that plan?

What is a reasonable amount of knowledge and expertise you need to make all this happen?

TACTIC 9: GET HELP BUILDING, ADVANCING AND MARKETING YOUR NONPROFIT WEBSITE

For most executive directors and organization leaders, the process of advancing and maintaining their website is the very last thing they have time for. Even if they can devote a full day to complete the website, someone must still write the content, design the graphics, post on social media, and update the entire website on a regular basis. This demands more human resources and time – the two most precious assets of any nonprofit organization – than they may have.

We understand these constraints and are ready to help with any portion of advancing and maintaining your website. Contact us today for a **Nonprofit Website Blueprint**, created specifically for your organization. We have helped more than 60,000 nonprofit organizations all over the world with planning, building websites, advancing and improving content, developing apps, designing landing pages and consulting. We want to serve you next.

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