



The Five Biggest Web-Site Mistakes Nonprofits Make —and How to Avoid Them

Use these tips to assure a successful Web site.

By Erin Presseau

Got a new Web site on the drawing board? Or ready to update a site you've had for awhile? You'll be more effective if you steer clear of the following blunders:

Mistake #1 - Starting with the look

Nonprofit organizations often plan how they want their Web site to look before they sit down and figure out what they want it to do. A good site design starts with strategy and finishes with art. What do you want to accomplish with your Web site? Increase visibility? Attract volunteers? Encourage online donations? Study your old Web logs to see how visitors have used your site in the past. Then design Web pages that call visitors to the action you want them to take. That way you capitalize on your stakeholder browsing trends. Starting with the artwork is putting the cart before the horse.

Mistake #2 - Designing for your convenience

Don't organize your site based on what's familiar or convenient for your organization or its programs. You want a site that's convenient for

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its end users. Put yourself in their shoes. Use language that makes sense to your intended audience. Translate acronyms (and any other jargon) into plain English. Don't assume that everyone will approach your site the same way. Different audiences use the Web and search sites differently, so provide a variety of ways for people to get at information—by cause, interest, or location—but don't overwhelm them.

Mistake #3 - Shooting for the moon

It's tempting to use all the latest Web technology in your site, but be careful not to get carried away. Balance your desire to be hip with practicality. Some design elements, such as Flash graphics or oddly-shaped photos, may look great, but could cause an endless array of problems. You know what it's like to land on someone's home page and wait for 30 seconds for the animation to load. Makes a bad impression. Sometimes, keeping it simple is still the best advice.

Mistake #4 - Underestimating the cost

Don't low-ball your own project. Nonprofit organizations frequently misjudge the time it takes to prepare content, provide links, gather images, and thoroughly test a Web site. Developing a site is a major

effort, so make sure you budget enough time and resources for it.

Mistake #5 - Launching on Friday

Whatever you do, don't launch a new Web site on a Friday. Invariably, something will go wrong over the weekend when no one's around to handle it. Unveil your new site on a Monday or Tuesday, and prepare your staff to deal with unexpected developments. ■

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RESOURCES

Bhagat, Vinay, "Online Advocacy: Mobilize Supporters to Take Action," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 21, No. 6.

Elges, Mary, "Driving Traffic to Your Web Site," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 6.

Roufa, Mike, "Marketing Your Web Site with Search Engines," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 17, No. 2.

These resources are available at www.snpo.org/members.