

Website - Is It Time To Refresh or Replace Yours?

by Melynn Sight

For an association, a website can be your most valuable real estate. This is the place all members can visit you, anytime, day or night.

If you think your website is only a supporting resource, think again. This is one of the important places you present the value of your organization. It is also the place new members, prospective members, and (for some of you) consumers go for information. Finally, members of all ages, tenure, and location appreciate direct access to information.

Simply put, a bad website is one that doesn't:

1. **Inform Members** – That's an easy one. The basic goal behind association websites is to be a place for finding information that helps a member do business. This might be practical business advice, education, government advocacy, or news and market information.
2. **Offer Member or User an Easy Ride** – Your website should provide a simple map from point A to points B, C, D, E, etc., or you will fail to achieve your goal. If your visitor finds it difficult to get the information they need in less than 1 minute they will be frustrated with the resource you worked so hard to provide.
3. **Offer an Easy Crawl for Members** – Navigation, navigation. How easy is it for a member to find information at midnight when they are searching from their home office to prepare for an early morning meeting? This means limiting the number of clicks to get to a page, and making each landing page clear about what is inside.
4. **Present the Association in a Professional Way** – Funky, clunky, ugly, outdated websites makes a bad impression on members and fails to convey credibility. This means an up-to-date design, up-to-date website copy (weekly or at least monthly), easy-to-understand calls-to-action, and a system of navigation that gets your users where they need to go with ease.

What Makes a Good Website?

Simply said, a good website will accomplish your goals when you meet the needs of your members. Ask yourself these questions, and then think about a few areas that deserve your abundant attention:

1. **Technical Concerns** – What type of coding will best serve your needs? How scalable is the coding now and in the future? Web sites are constantly changing and what was once true last year is sometimes obsolete today. Choose your programmer carefully. Ask many questions about the programmer's history and skills. Also, there are so many options. Make sure your programmer explores all coding capabilities based on your specific needs. You don't need to re-invent a functionality that already exists.

2. **Website Design** – Good website design and attention to navigation produces a compelling, hassle-free experience for your members. This also applies to scalability – how will the design and navigational chart grow as you add content after 1 year, and after 5 years? And HEY, look to be sure your homepage is not stuffed with news, sponsors, special messages, and calendar items. *Don't* confuse your homepage with your newsletter.

3. **Website Copy** – What your website says to your members and visitors determines how useful and professional they find your site. Your website's copy needs to be good enough to be printed in a magazine. It also needs to begin with “what's in it for the member” and why they should read it.

4. **Usability** – Is the information, forms, and tools available on your website easy to find and use? If you have an online store, how easy is it to shop? Usability is a key element of good website design, and designing for the user helps determine if member a will return to your site.

Below are two sites I especially like:

Outstanding Design for a REALTOR® Association Website
[Florida Association of REALTORS®](#)

This is the most welcoming, friendly site I have seen across NAR. Serving the membership and feeding their success comes through loud and clear.

“Within each page, the Realtor® brand of professionalism, ethics, and trust is emphasized visually and with content placement,” says Peggy Musial, the site's editor. “Depicting our organization and its members in a professional manner to our viewing audience was a huge priority when designing the site. The goal was to create a magazine look, use images that our members could identify with, and use a color palette of orange, green, and blue that shouts out ‘Florida’.”

Customizing a site with the features you need in order to show member value
[CCIM \(Certified Commercial Investment Members\)](#)

CCIM wanted to create an email and an invitation designed especially for professionals—whether or not they are members. Non-members can pay for events by creating a guest account. After receiving an event email, invitees are able to see who else has RSVP'd, log in to their account, and pay for that event at their specified rate. CCIM's Account administrators can also track email usage and registrations.

This site also provides a database management tool. This means membership and attendance history can be tracked over time, customized, uploaded, and downloaded as needed. It's a welcome membership and prospecting tool for potential members.

So If You Know Your Website Is Bad...

No need to apologize. Some of the Internet's best websites began as learning experiences for the owner. And every association who has upgraded their system got better as they recognized their current

problems. Association leaders know that members value good website design. Leadership is willing to invest in it. So as you take a close look at your website, and evaluate if it needs an update, think about this:

1. Do you have a system of navigation that includes your most important site categories and is consistently placed on each and every page of the website?
2. Do you have a homepage that is uncluttered, welcoming, and invites your users to step inside?
3. Do you have a distinct visual look for your association that sets you obviously apart from your competition?
4. Do you have information that is easy for even the newest member to access?
5. Do you have a system of measurements so you know the popularity and use of the main components of the site?

Your website demonstrates your association's value when it treats your members well.

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