

TOP TIPS TO OPTIMIZE YOUR NONPROFIT'S NEXT WEBSITE UPDATE



INTRODUCTION

It's important to keep your nonprofit's website fresh and updated so that it stays relevant with your audiences, reinforces your organization's brand, and communicates effectively with current and prospective donors and constituents. But website redesigns can be challenging.

Two of the top challenges that nonprofits often face are:

1

IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME FOR A REDESIGN.

If you research the question of how often you should refresh or redesign your website, you'll find experts suggesting anywhere from every two to five years. So, how do you know when it's really time to change your nonprofit's website?

2

IT'S EASY TO OVER-ENGINEER YOUR WEBSITE DESIGN.

You want to communicate so many things to site visitors. But there are downsides to overly complex website designs. They make it hard for people to find information. They can also take longer to create/test, take more time to load in web browsers, and end up being more expensive to design and maintain.

Your guide to a more effective and efficient website redesign

Whether you're updating your entire website or refreshing a campaign or event microsite, this guide is full of highly effective tips to help you:



Understand when it's time for a website redesign



Make your website redesign more efficient



Get started with your website redesign

IS IT TIME FOR A WEBSITE REDESIGN?

Keeping your nonprofit's website fresh and updated is important, but it does take some amount of time, effort, and dollars. That's why it's critical to have a clear business justification for why now is the time for a website redesign.



In general, there are two overarching reasons to redesign your website:

If either (or both!) of these scenarios sounds familiar, chances are good that it's time for a website redesign.



YOUR WEBSITE PERFORMANCE IS FLAT OR DECLINING.

Traffic to your website might have levelled off. It could even be dropping. Dig in further, and you might find that site visitors are spending only a few seconds on your site and not clicking through to find out more about your organization and take the actions you want them to take – like registering for an event or donating to your cause.

In short, your website is not as effective as it should be.



YOUR WEBSITE NO LONGER ALIGNS WITH YOUR NONPROFIT'S WORK.

The world changes rapidly, and your nonprofit must evolve to keep up. The demand for your organization's services might have changed. Maybe you've retooled your fundraising to include more virtual events and campaigns. Perhaps you've even adjusted your strategy and rebranded your organization to support a new direction.

In short, the website that worked a few years ago doesn't support the way you work today and where you're headed for the future.

TIP

Good website design applies to more than just your nonprofit's overall website. It also applies to microsites for your fundraising campaigns, events, and programs. Keep all of your nonprofit's online sites in mind as you evaluate the need for website redesign.



UNCOVER ISSUES WITH YOUR CURRENT WEBSITE

Once you understand the overarching business reasons for redesigning your nonprofit's website, it's time to dig deeper. Pinpoint what it is about your website that needs attention and what must change to support your goals.



Here are areas that often need attention in website design and development:

1

Visual design

The way your website looks conveys your organization's mission and identity. When executed well, it can inspire site visitors to volunteer, donate, and take other actions to support your organization.

Items that often need attention include:

- **Branding is outdated.** Your organization's branding has been updated, and you need your website to reflect the new logo, colors, and overall look and feel.
- **Your content has changed.** You have new content to share, but it doesn't fit well into your current website design. You also have older content that could be simplified or reorganized to better address your site visitors' needs.
- **The site looks tired.** Your website design hasn't had a refresh in the past few years. It's looking old and outdated.

2

User experience (UX)

A poor experience can turn away site visitors who otherwise might have signed up for much-needed services, volunteered to help, donated to your cause, or supported your organization in other ways.

Areas that often need attention include:

- **It's difficult to find things.** You've added new pages and content over time, and now important information is buried multiple clicks away. Site visitors can't easily find what they're looking for and what you want to highlight. Reworking the architecture of your site can help to make the website easier to navigate.
- **The mobile experience needs help.** Your website might function well on laptop and desktop computers. But the site misses the mark on mobile devices. With so many people using mobile devices these days, you need a site design that's responsive so that it also looks good and works well on mobile devices.
- **The website is not accessible.** Your website doesn't follow Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which make websites usable for everyone, including those with disabilities. Following WCAG standards in your site redesign will help ensure that everyone can access information on your website.

3

Technology

The website template and content editing tool you use can make a big difference in the cost and performance of your website.

Items that often need attention include:

- **The website technology costs too much.** Your website platform and hosting tools have grown too expensive (or your budget has tightened) and you need a more affordable solution.
- **The website isn't flexible enough.** You need a website tool that makes it easier for you and your staff to add and update images and text as well as modify content components on pages. Also, you want to enhance your website with new functionality today and might need more down the road. You need a website tool that's flexible enough to grow with you.
- **The site is slowing down.** As your website becomes older and more complex, the website has slowed down. It takes longer for pages to load and for forms to process. You need a platform that is continually updated and a website design that optimizes page loading times so you don't lose the attention of site visitors.

CAUTION

A CAUTION ABOUT WEBSITE HOSTING

As you move forward with a new website, know that some design and development firms might offer to “host” your website for an annual fee. Be wary of this, as they might simply deploy your site with a hosting service and then charge you a markup fee. The biggest downside of this approach is that you no longer have a direct relationship with your hosting service. And if things don't work out with the design firm, they can possibly hold your website “hostage” (we've seen it happen). By having a direct relationship with your hosting provider, you have more control over the relationship with your design firm.



TIPS FOR A MORE EFFICIENT WEBSITE REDESIGN

Now that you have a good picture of what you're trying to accomplish with your website redesign, here are some highly effective tips for minimizing the price tag and workload while still reaching your website refresh goals.



Do some work in advance.

Before you start working with a website designer, do as much prep work as you can. Coming to initial meetings with key information will help your website redesign team get up and running faster and ultimately save time and money on the project.

Some advance work that will help your project run more efficiently:



List your business goals.

Prioritize your goals for the redesign based on your business needs. Focusing on your top business needs will help your website redesign team to determine what information goes where on the website and what technology changes might be required. It will also help your website designer make recommendations about how to organize key information.



Review website analytics.

Look at reports from your current website to determine which pages are most visited and how site visitors are using your website. This information helps to show your website redesign team what's working and what's not in terms of highlighting the information you want to highlight and helping site visitors find the information they're seeking.



Look at similar websites.

Create a short list of websites that you like – whether it's the entire website or certain elements of the site. Make notes about what you like about the websites and why. This approach will help the website design team to quickly visualize and discuss ideas for the website redesign.



Make a site map.

Start a list of the pages on your current website, organized by their location within the website. This map will be a helpful starting point for your redesign team, and since you're more familiar with the current website, you'll be able to create it faster than the third-party designer can.

Simplify the website design.

A complicated design and user interface (UI) makes it difficult for people to find information. It can also take longer to create/test, can take longer to load in web browsers, and can end up being more expensive to design and maintain.

Some tips for your website design team:



Get feedback.

Ask for feedback about your current website from a variety of stakeholders and constituencies, including donors, volunteers, service recipients, board members, and staff members. Ask them what they like and dislike about your current website design and navigation, including how easy it is to find information and take actions, such as making a donation or signing up for an event. Use their feedback to find ways to streamline your website navigation.



Use a human-centered design approach.

Website visitors don't necessarily know how your nonprofit is organized. They just want to get information or take action. So, it can be helpful to use a "jobs mentality" with your site redesign in which you consider which jobs, or tasks, site visitors are going to your site to accomplish – such as learning how to obtain services, finding out about upcoming events, registering for an event, donating, or signing up to volunteer.

To help simplify your design, consider what your site visitors are trying to accomplish, make those items as prominent as possible, and label sections and calls-to-actions with terms that correspond with what your site visitors want to accomplish.



Clean house.

Take the opportunity to review and remove outdated content. The trimmer your site is, the easier it will be to organize and navigate.



Streamline online forms.

Long forms can be a big turnoff. Site visitors might give up before completing a long form, and longer forms can take excessive time to process. They also take longer to build in the first place. To make your website more efficient, be sure to ask for only the information you need to process the donation, event registration, etc. Your forms will be easier to build and maintain, your site visitors will be more likely to complete the forms, and your forms will process faster.



Think mobile-first.

With so many people using mobile devices, it's important to design your website as mobile-first, not just mobile-friendly. That means designing it specifically to be viewed on mobile devices. This approach makes your web pages easier to navigate and interact with, as well as faster to load, on mobile devices.

Use web design templates.

Setting up and using page templates as part of your website redesign can make it faster and easier to build new pages and update existing pages. Templates can also be designed with minimal code so that pages load more quickly.

Many content management systems (CMS) and website design tools include web page design template capabilities. And for repeated elements throughout your website, many web design tools allow you to create a library of code-efficient, pre-tested snippets – such as buttons, image blocks, and text sections – to further streamline page building. Consult with your website design and development team to see if web page templates make sense for your website.



OPTIMIZE YOUR DONATION FORMS

While it's important to streamline your online forms, your website redesign is also an opportunity to enhance your donation forms to get the most out of each donation. For example:



Ask the donor to cover the transaction fee.

When someone donates through your online donation forms, you're typically charged a transaction fee by your payment processor – effectively reducing each donation by some percentage. Provide an option on your online donation form for donors to cover the cost of transaction fees, so that you can capture those lost dollars.



Add a monthly giving pop-up.

Present donors with the option to make their donation a recurring gift, with the convenience of monthly payments charged automatically to their credit card. This approach encourages donors to remain donors and give more over time.



Offer a range of payment options.

Giving donors the ability to give via their preferred way provides a more attractive path to completing transactions. There are many online payment options beyond credit or debit cards. Consider offering digital payment options such as: ACH, Amazon Pay, Apple Pay, Cryptocurrency, and PayPal.



Embed a matching gift tool.

Add a corporate matching tool to your donation forms to make it easier to take advantage of corporate matching programs to boost your fundraising campaign results. Multiple vendors make it simple to embed their matching gift tool on web pages and donation forms.



IS A WORDPRESS WEBSITE RIGHT FOR YOUR NONPROFIT?

When you're ready to re-design your nonprofit's website, it's an ideal time to re-think the content management system (CMS) you use to build your website and blog. You have multiple options.

A great choice for many organizations is WordPress. It has a lot to offer nonprofits:

- It requires no software licensing fees, so it keeps maintenance costs low.
- It's easy to learn and use compared with other CMSs.
- WordPress websites are relatively easy to update.
- You can start with any one of thousands of free or inexpensive WordPress themes or design (or hire someone to design) your own WordPress theme from scratch.
- There are tens of thousands of WordPress Plugins available, so a site built on WordPress can grow with you over time. However, note that every Plugin added will increase potential security issues and the chance of website code "breaking," so it's important to use Plugins only when necessary.

TIP

Our team at Cathexis Partners can help you determine which CMS tool is right for your organization's website. We can also help you create an affordable custom design with your nonprofit's unique needs in mind.



CHECKLIST: TAKE THE NEXT STEPS WITH YOUR WEBSITE REDESIGN

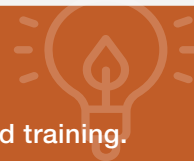
Now that you've considered the business reasons for a website redesign, understand areas of your website that might need attention, and have approaches for a more efficient website design, it's time to take the next steps.



Here's a simple checklist to get started with your nonprofit's fresh, new website:

TIP

Allow plenty of time for the website redesign process – from planning to testing and training. A general rule of thumb: Allow four to nine months for a small to mid-sized website, and up to a year for a larger and more complex website that requires an extensive internal approval process and multiple integrations.



Assess your current website.

Look at your website analytics to identify key trends that point to needed changes on your website. For example:

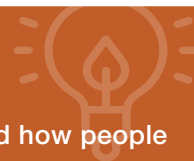
- What are your website traffic trends over the past two to three years?
- How long are site visitors staying on your website?
- Are they visiting important pages on your site? How long are they staying on those pages?
- What is the conversion rate of site visitors to those who take an action, such as filling out a form or making a donation?

Consider your website from a visitor's point of view:

- Does your site look modern, and does it reflect your organization's current brand?
- Can you find your organization's most important campaigns and programs quickly and easily?
- Does the site look good and work well on multiple devices, including mobile devices?
- Do pages load quickly?

TIP

Consider conducting a search engine optimization (SEO) audit to better understand how people are reaching your website. You and your website team can then use this information to make your website easier to find.



Think about the back end of your website:

- Is it cost-effective to host and maintain?
- Does it allow you and others at your organization to easily make content edits and update functionality?
- Is it time for a new content management system that makes your site easier to build and maintain?



List your key website issues.

Write down the top challenges with your website – from visual design and navigation to search engine optimization (SEO) and technology. Consider if the challenges call for a site refresh, a full website redesign, and/or new website technology. If SEO is a challenge, then consider adding an SEO consultant to your website redesign team.



Get approval.

Use your assessment and research to make the business case with your executives and board of directors that it's time for a new website:

- Explain the overarching business reason for a website redesign.
- Share the specific issues surrounding your current website.
- Ask for approval.



Find a website design and development partner.

Finding the right solution will depend on your organization's procedures. However, here are the most common steps for moving forward with a new website:

- 1 Research website design and development firms.
- 2 Narrow the list of possible firms to three.
- 3 Share your list of issues and requirements with the firms, and ask for an assessment and proposal for a new website.
- 4 Make your selection, and work with the design/development firm on a project schedule.

TIP

Consider working with a website design and development firm that works exclusively with nonprofit organizations. They'll have a strong understanding of how nonprofits work, a knowledge of best practices for things like donation form design, and experience with website editing tools that integrate with nonprofit software.



GET A MODERN WEBSITE THAT SUPPORTS YOUR NONPROFIT'S GOALS.

Redesigning your website doesn't have to be painful or costly. At Cathexis Partners, we're ready to help you update your website to work more efficiently and effectively for your nonprofit.

If you have questions or would like help with the approaches in this guide, contact Cathexis Partners today:



cathexispartners.com



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