

A Dozen Tips for Sprucing up Your Website

Have you given your website some design love lately? Here are some fast tips for taking your site to the next level.

1. **Don't forget the fold.** Just as old-fashioned newspapers have a fold line, if a web page gets too long, people will have to scroll to see all of the content on the page. When designing your home and interior pages, make sure to put important items such as news features, donate buttons, and e-newsletter sign-ups above the fold, where they can be seen easily.
2. **Be a creative conformist.** The web works because key site elements appear in consistent locations across all well-designed web sites. While you want your website to have a look and feel that is unique to your organization, make sure you also follow design conventions. For example, people have come to expect that search bars be placed in the top right of a webpage while logos are most often in the top left position. Nine times out of ten you should stick with these conventions. Groups like Amazon play with these conventions (http://www.etre.com/blog/2006/05/five_days_amazoncouk/), but again it's generally wisest to plunk key navigational elements where people expect to see them.
3. **Make your asks contextual.** Don't let isolated "donate buttons" do all the fundraising legwork on your site. Work donation asks into areas where you are telling the most compelling stories about your accomplishments.
4. **Let thy people donate!** When someone does click a donate button, reward them immediately with a donate form. Don't make them click more or wade through a lot of copy before letting them help you. In fact, it's highly recommended that the form be the default first page of your donate section.
5. **Do a text check.** What kind of font(s) does your website use? Is it too large? Too small? What colors do you use? Are they easily readable?
6. **Do a copy check.** Is all of the information on your site critical? What can you remove? What can you pair down and shorten?
7. **Tell your best stories.** Does your copy rattle off facts alone or weave a good story? We believe people think in terms of stories whether they are watching a movie or making a donation. Your homepage layout, calls to action, and contextual donation asks should work together to build a coherent narrative. Make sure to also tell people how they can become part of your story. What is their role? To be a donor, an activist, both?

8. **Show pictures.** You know the saying. It's true—images speak volumes. And that's a good thing when you are trying to capture someone's attention in a matter of seconds on the web. Use images to convey the essence of your organization's mission and to anchor your page designs.
9. **Improve your search engine ranking.** Make sure your page titles accurately describe what's on each page of your website. So for example, instead of naming every page ABC Organization, title them ABC Organization- Climate Change Program, ABC Organization- Save the Tiger Campaign, etc. Visit Google at <http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/topic.py?topic=8524> for more tips on SEO.
10. **Think like your users.** Do you organize your content in a way that reflects your internal organizational structure or your users' informational needs? (Hopefully, it's the latter.) Internally, you might have "campaigns," "projects" and "initiatives." While the differences may seem really big to you, they are just confusing to your users. The public simply wants to know what you work on and how they can help. Do you protect forests? Do you coach basketball? How can your site's visitors get involved in this work?
11. **Get to know your users.** Do you really know who comes to your website? Use a combination of web analytics (we like Google analytics—it's robust and free) and audience research to learn who visits your site and why. SurveyMonkey lets you set up online surveys for next to nothing. You can email your members a link. They fill the survey out online and voila, instant insights into what your users think you are doing well and what you can improve.
12. **Experiment.** Don't be afraid to try things online. Using tools like Google Analytics, you can test different page layouts and track user pathways. The more you experiment, the more likely find winning formulas that make your website work.

Tired of reading? Does your website need serious surgery? Or, just want to talk about chickens? Contact Susan Finkelpearl, Online Strategy Director, at susan@freerangestudios.com or 202-234-5613.