

**SUCCESSFUL WEB
STRATEGIES FOR
NON-PROFITS**

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The case non-profit, InterNonProfit (INP) is a small organization which works with farmers in Iowa to help them preserve their old historic barns. The group is in its infancy, and is just getting ready to begin operating.

THE NEW NON-PROFIT CHALLENGE:

Now, more than ever, non-profits need to become familiar with the technological tools that are available and learn how to use them to make their organizations more available, more efficient and have more access to donors.

It has been said that we are bombarded by thousands of marketing messages a day. Just think of the number of logos, advertisements, and radio commercials you encounter on a daily basis. Many of those messages are asking for your potential donor's money. With this heightened competition, non-profits need to be on top of the latest technologies and make quick and decisive moves to harness the power of the Internet in their organization. It's no longer a question of being abreast of technology- it is now a necessity for survival.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

This guide is for non-profits which want to build or improve their web presence. A fictitious non-profit organization is used throughout this guide (in the left margin) as an example of how to implement the directions given throughout this guide.

We hope you find this guide helpful in assisting you improve or build your web presence for your organization and wish you the best in your web development endeavors!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Corp.), and as a University Student Consultant (Microsoft Corp.). John also served as the VP of Technology for the American Marketing Association and as the President of the Management Information Systems Association, two student groups at The University of Iowa. With 7 years of web development experience, John is responsible for business development, web consulting and project management at HolliThomp Web Marketing based out of Iowa City, Iowa.

WHY THE WEB?

Simply put, a web site will allow your non-profit to operate and exchange information faster, better and cheaper. Primarily, you can inexpensively share information and increase accessibility to your non-profit.

Possible uses of a web site include:

- Transmit your message to many more people than other forms of outreach
- Enroll new clients, members & donors
- Conduct surveys and store valuable data that can be used for future decision making or client and donor lists
- Seek donations via credit cards and secure servers
- Display and collaborate on documents such as directories, proposals, or project plans
- Keep current information accessible to the public
- Display employment opportunities and take applications for employment online
- Link to other complementary resources
- Help build communication and community among members, clients, donors, and the general public

Web and IT systems are effective means of empowering your non-profit's communication capability to be fast, low cost, and to use adaptable solutions for your changing needs.

InterNonProfit: Why the Web?

Think about what information you want to share and with whom and how you can use the 3 main benefits of a web site.

INP would like to make sure that anyone searching for help with preservation of their historic barn finds them on the web.

They would like to increase accessibility to potential donors by being online 24/7 so when they send collateral materials such as flyers out to prospective donors, the donors can learn about their organization at their convenience. Even at 2 in the morning.

INP: Stakeholder Basic Needs

In short, INP used Gallup's principles in the following ways:

Level 1: The image of the web site is consistent with the new look of their collateral materials. The same service offerings that are available in their brochures are explained and offered on the web.

Level 2: Stakeholders can view information online 24/7 from anywhere in the world.

Level 3: Past stories of INP members who have restored their barns shows visitors that INP knows what it's like to be in their situation.

Level 4: INP published their guide to inexpensive barn restoration to their web site so barn owners could have some free information and advice.

The Gallup Organization reasons that all stakeholders have 4 levels of basic needs. Listed from most basic to the most intense: accuracy, availability, partnership, and advice. Let's explore these needs starting at level 1 and see how they can be impacted by a web solution.

Level 1: Accuracy

Your stakeholders desire their interactions with your organization to be accurate. Your web site should be accurate and up to date.

Level 2: Availability

When your stakeholders rely on your services, they desire to have unfettered access your services at any time, from any place. A web site can provide them the level of access they desire. If someone is searching for a good group for a donation and you aren't on the web, someone else will get that donation.

Level 3: Partnership

Stakeholders want to feel that you understand what they want. Your web site can convey the message that you understand their needs. This could be through personal stories, illustrations about buying or services experience or in a variety of other ways.

Level 4: Advice

At the highest level, stakeholders need you to provide them advice. Your web site can provide useful and clear suggestions and guides.

PHASES OF A SUCCESSFULL WEB PROJECT

When you understand the benefits and value that you can receive from implementing a web site, you are ready to begin the actual web project process. This process has 7 phases including (1) pre-planning, (2) planning, (3) analysis, (4) design, (5)

development, (6) implementation, and (7) re-evaluation and modification.

Following the steps of the process is necessary to ensure that every part of your site stems from your core organizational objectives. When you embark on a web development project address the basic values, principles, ideals and processes that have already made you a success. Focus on what you do well, follow the planning process outlined below, and you will see great successes in your web project.

PHASE 1: PRE-PLANNING

In this first phase, you explore the questions of (1) what is your message (2) how will you help your stakeholders and (3) based on 1 & 2, is it feasible: yes or no?

1) What is your general goal? Explore it by answering the following basic questions:

- **What is your message?** Ask yourself what you want to say on your site.
- **Who are you targeting?** Who is your audience? Who would use your site? Why would they use it?
- **What is the budget available for web development- if any?** How much for creation and maintenance? What type of site can you afford?
- **How can you present your content effectively?** What content will be available? What are your featured categories (which turns into your menu)? Should the site be consistent in look and feel with other collateral material you

already have or should you re-invent your visual appeal to your stakeholders? Are there other sites you would like to emulate?

- **What will your site accomplish?** Will it be a research tool or just simple information sharing? How will it improve communication? What are the benefits of online exposure?
- **Can you do it in-house?** How will you re-assign staff to provide for ongoing maintenance and updating? If not in-house, how do you choose a consultant or a design firm to do it for you? (To answer the last question, read this article and armed with the understanding you now have, try to find a firm that follows this same approach and you will be in good hands.)

2) How will your site benefit your stakeholders? Revisit Gallup's principles. Identify how your web site can achieve Gallup's 4 levels of stakeholder needs: Accuracy, Availability, Partnership, and Advice. Write your ideas down.

3) Is it still feasible? This is really a yes or a no based on the information you now have at the conclusion of Phase 1: Pre-Planning.

PHASE 2: PLANNING

Now that you have established that you want an effective web site and you need to engage in detailed planning. You need to set deadlines, identify monetary and human resources, content, and determine how updates will be handled.

- 1) What deadlines will you have: is there a date which it would be advantageous to complete the site by?
- 2) Where is the funding or time going to come from?

- 3) Who is going to be involved in this project?
- 4) What should be included in the site?
- 5) What text and images will you need?
- 6) How will you handle updates?

PHASE 3: ANALYSIS

Now that you have your plan, you now need to look at the actual costs and benefits and make a final determination about whether or not you will undertake a project to improve your web site.

- 1) **Identify the up front (fixed) costs**

What will it cost to start up the web site? Include software you may need to purchase to build the site, the cost of the staff hours re-directed from other activities, web hosting set up charges, the price of the domain name, and any other up front costs you may incur.

- 2) **Identify the ongoing, (variable) costs**

What will your web site cost you annually? Include the cost of staff hours needed for continual site updates, and the price of web hosting, the domain name and any other ongoing expenses you may incur.

- 3) **Explore the benefits, tangible and intangible**

What are the benefits, in dollars, that you may receive from your web site? This includes estimates for increased donations or other benefits that can be directly related to increased cash. Add in the intangible benefits: the estimated savings from increased efficiency, improved perception of your non-profit and more.

- 4) **Evaluate the costs vs. benefits**

Use the information on the costs and benefits above to evaluate your web project based on total cost of ownership and compare it with the tangible and intangible benefits gained from the web site.

Calculate the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO)

Add up your fixed costs and your annual variable costs. Multiply this number by the number of years you plan to use the web site. This number gives you your Total Cost of Ownership. $(FC + VC)YRS = TCO$

Calculate your benefits

Add up the dollar values you estimate for your tangible and intangible benefits you expect to receive from your web site over the number of years you plan to use the web site.

Do your benefits outweigh your costs? If so, then you should rest assured that you are heading in the right direction your web site project. If they don't then you may need to re-consider whether or not you may need to simplify your web site to reduce the cost enough so the benefits are greater than the costs.

Even if you have no budget for a web site, you need to realize that more likely than not, you will be spending some money. It is possible to spend as little as \$5 a month for web site hosting and \$7 a year for a domain name. The rest, you could do yourself. The cost can go up from there, but there will be costs, especially time investments, to consider.

PHASE 4: DESIGN

You're now halfway through the whole process and you are just beginning to get to the fun! This is where your decision about whether or not to do the site in-house or externally will make a huge difference in your level of involvement in the web design and development process. From here on out, I will explain the basics you need to create the site. I won't go into details, but links will be provided to point you to resources online that will help you find guides to go further.

The design phase is key to the success of your site. This is the step where you determine how the site looks and how information will be shared. Focus on the following 4 main points:

1) **Create a “5 second front page”**

The first page of the site should capture your visitors’ attention in 5 seconds or less. This can be accomplished using catch phrases or metaphoric pictures on the front page. If you don’t capture your visitors’ attention in the first 5 seconds on the site, it is likely they will leave and not come back.

2) **Simple navigation**

Create a menu that contains a one or two word description about the main areas of your non-profit. Possible menu headings include: home, about us, donations, newsletter, & contact. You can choose the menu headings that best fit your non-profit. This menu should be the same on all pages of the site.

3) **Don’t put too much information on one page.**

Each page of the web site should contain information that pertains to the menu heading that the visitor clicked on to get to that web page. If the content (text, pictures) that you are considering adding to the page doesn’t pertain to the menu heading that it resides under, then put it on another page under a better menu heading.

4) **Use the Onion Model**

Imagine your web site as an onion where the outside layer is the first page of your web site and layers of the onion need to be peeled back to reveal the rest of your web site—where the core of your information actually exists.

The first layer:

The first layer, the front page of your web site, is the first thing a visitor sees. Your challenge for the first layer is to hook visitors' attention and convince them to travel deeper into your site. This layer is where the visitor decides in 5 seconds or less if they are going to stay on your web site. The first layer should contain "catch phrases" that will catch the visitor's attention and convince them to look deeper into your site by clicking on the menu.

The second layer:

The second layer, or the summary pages of your web site, is what visitors see when they click on the menu headings when they traverse your web site. Your objective on the second layer pages is to provide more information about the menu heading in summary format. Use the elevator conversation approach: don't put anything on second layer pages that you couldn't explain to someone in the time you would have on an elevator ride. The second layer page is where you provide enough information to convince the visitor to read the detailed information that will follow when they click a link to the third layer.

The third layer:

The third layer is where you provide the visitor with all of the information. Your objective is to satisfy their need for the information you convinced them they needed when they looked at your first two layers and then to take an action: possibly to contact you.

Below are tools and resources to help you with the technical aspects of the site design phase:

Tools: Adobe Photoshop, FrontPage

Resources: www.photoshopgurus.com and

webdesign.about.com

PHASE 5: DEVELOPMENT

Now that you have the system design and you have the graphical interface, you are now ready to begin building the actual site. If your site is simple- 1 page or so, then this phase is doable for the average person. If your site is more complex than that and includes contact forms where visitors submit information, donation accepting capabilities, databases, or other information gathering or sharing tools, then you will probably need to hire someone to guide you or to build the site for you. Many web design and development firms will give a discount to non-profits especially if you have already completed the first 3 or 4 phases. If you want to develop the site yourself, then here are the basics of how you will go about it.

Details of how to use programs to create web sites is outside of the scope of this guide. To create web sites, you can use programs as simple as Microsoft Word or you could get as complex as using Dreamweaver. The best way to learn how to build the actual web pages is to search on Google for how to guides for the software you choose. To get you started, the following are some of the main elements of a web site that you will need, and the tools and resources you can use to create them.

Create the actual web pages, the foundation of the site:

The first thing you need to do is build the skeleton of the web site. This is where you create the actual HTML pages that will be hosted on your web server for people to see. One of the best and easiest tools out there is FrontPage 2003. It has a similar layout to Microsoft Word, is simple to use, and there are a lot of free informational guides on the internet. A good book on FrontPage is [Microsoft Office FrontPage 2003 Inside Out](#).

Create forms for gathering input from visitors:

Forms are a technical term for the boxes you fill out on a web site that sends information to the web site owner.

Many of you may have filled out your credit card information when purchasing something on the internet. When you typed that information in, you were filling out a form. Forms can be used to gather information from your visitors through surveys, contact pages, or for donations. FrontPage 2003 helps with creating forms and Microsoft Office FrontPage2003 Inside Out is a good book for step by step information on how to create and implement forms into your web site.

Create a team collaboration page:

A team collaboration page is a special web site that allows you to work with others and share documents, calendars, images, contact information and more through the internet. It allows team collaborators to “check out” documents so they can work on it without writing over someone else’s work. Team collaboration pages are especially useful if you are working on a project with people who aren’t nearby. SharePoint Web Portal is a team collaboration software package that is free from Microsoft. If you don’t want to hassle with setting up the software and a server, you can pay around \$20 a month to have a team collaboration page at www.bcentral.com.

Create a payment / donation receiving page:

Receiving donations or payments through a web site is a great way to make your organization available to your donors 24/7. You can program a web page to accept payments by using forms and by creating a secure web connection. To create a page to handle donations, you need to be quite advanced. To simplify the process and to ensure that the page is secure, I recommend using PayPal (www.paypal.com) or bCentral Commerce

Manager (www.bcentral.com). Visit either of these sites to learn how to use their services to make your web site capable of receiving secure donations.

PHASE 6: IMPLEMENTATION

Now you have your site ready for the big show! You now have all the files you need for the site on a CD or on your computer and are ready to make your site available to the world. This phase is critical to success, because your web site can fail miserably if you don't follow through with ALL of the Implementation Phase in its entirety. The following steps in the Implementation Phase are a mix between technical and non-technical, but they are all tasks the average person is capable of doing. Please read through the following steps carefully and ensure that you don't skip any, for that could cost you greatly in the future success of your web project.

Set up web hosting

Web hosting is a service you purchase usually for a monthly fee of around \$30 a month which provides space on the internet for your web site. The web hosting provider maintains web servers and internet connections so you don't have to worry about the staff or the expense of doing so yourself. This space is where you will eventually upload your web pages that you created using FrontPage. Simple hosting can be found at www.bcentral.com.

Upload your site using File Transfer Protocol (FTP)

Now that you have purchased web hosting space, you can now connect to the hosting provider's server and upload the web pages you created in FrontPage. Your hosting provider will provide you with an FTP address and username and password for you to use to connect to your account. Use some FTP software such as WSFTP (www.ipswitch.com) to connect and upload

your files.

Acquire and configure a domain name

For visitors to easily find your web site, you must have a domain name and have your web site be able to be found in search engines such as Google. To register a domain name that will point visitors to your web hosting server, you need to register your domain name for around \$7. The best domain name registrar out there is GoDaddy (www.godaddy.com). Go to their web site and type in your non-profit's name as one word, no spaces, to see if it's available. If it is, then go ahead and complete the registration process. If it isn't available, you need to come up with a variant. For example, if your organization name is InterNonProfit, then you may want to try internonprofit.org first, if it's not available, try variants such as inonprofit.org, inp.com, etc. Once you have found a domain name that is available, register it. You will need to follow the directions provided by GoDaddy. When it asks you where you host your site, choose "hosted elsewhere" and then ask your web hosting provider for their Name Server address. This is what you will need to enter into the GoDaddy registration so the domain name you bought will point to your web hosting server where your web pages reside. If you have questions, just call GoDaddy.

Building awareness of your site – promotion

One of the most important parts of the success of your web site will be how successfully you promote your site. In short, you need to get your web site address (your domain name) listed anywhere and everywhere. This includes your non-profit's business cards, your receipts, your brochures, your advertisements, and other places on the web. To be listed and found on the web, you need to be in search engines.

Get listed in search engines

It is not a simple process to get listed in search engines, but the following are the bare basics. You need to make sure that your web pages have meta tags (HTML programming code) with keywords and descriptions. Add page titles to your web pages that are related to the content of the page as well as the keywords. To find out how to add meta tags and keywords to your site, do a Google search for “adding meta tags”. After you have added meta tags, keywords, and descriptions, you need to submit your site to web directories and search engines such as DMOZ (www.dmoz.com) and to Google (www.google.com). Instructions for doing so are listed on their web sites. Once you have them listed, call everyone you know, especially partners, and ask them to link from their web site to your web site. This will get you listed faster and increase your ranking once you are listed in the search engines.

Set up update process

The final part of a successful web implementation is to ensure that you have formulated an update process to make sure that the content of your web site is continually relevant and up-to-date. Meet with people in your organization who handle communication creation and formulate a plan of action for keeping the site fresh. You'll be glad you took the time to do so.

PHASE 7: RE-EVALUATION & MODIFICATION

Periodically, perhaps every 6 months, return to Phases 1 & 2. Has anything changed? Re-evaluate and make modifications as needed. This step is critical to the success of your site. If visitors come to a web site that is out of date, they tend to leave instead of wasting their time with potentially inaccurate information.

FINAL REMARKS

We have explained how non-profits could use web sites and we have walked you through the strategic web process with 7 phases including (1) pre-planning, (2) planning, (3) analysis, (4) design, (5) development, (6) implementation, and (7) re-evaluation and modification.

If you follow this process, and use the tools and resources we referenced, then you will ensure that your web endeavors will be a success.