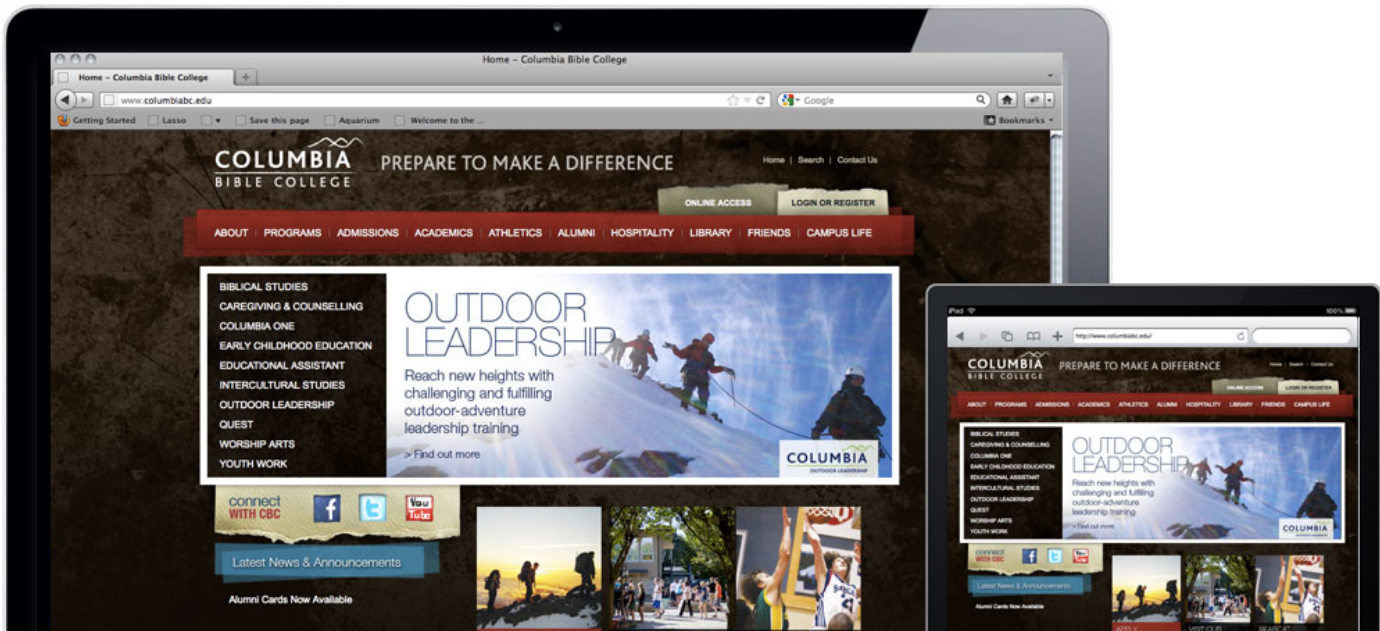




Top Ten Design Elements for Nonprofit Web Design

Written by Allison Flanary, Creative Principal



Make sure your website resonates with *your* audience

Focus on their needs, not yours
Use the right language
Consider mobile and usability

Your website is intended for your audience, so provide them a site that meets their needs and helps them accomplish their goals. Your site design and content should anticipate what your audience wants to do and make it easy for them.

Make sure language is friendly, straightforward, and free of industry jargon or inside-terms. Include content and images that showcase your purpose and communicate to your audience why your cause and mission is important to them. Writing is an art AND a science. Every bit of content should serve a purpose and showcase your mission. Create a design that is friendly for all platforms and browsers as more and more people are accessing the web via other means than a traditional desktop browser.

Portfolio Examples

Columbia Bible College: <http://www.columbiabc.edu/> (pictured)

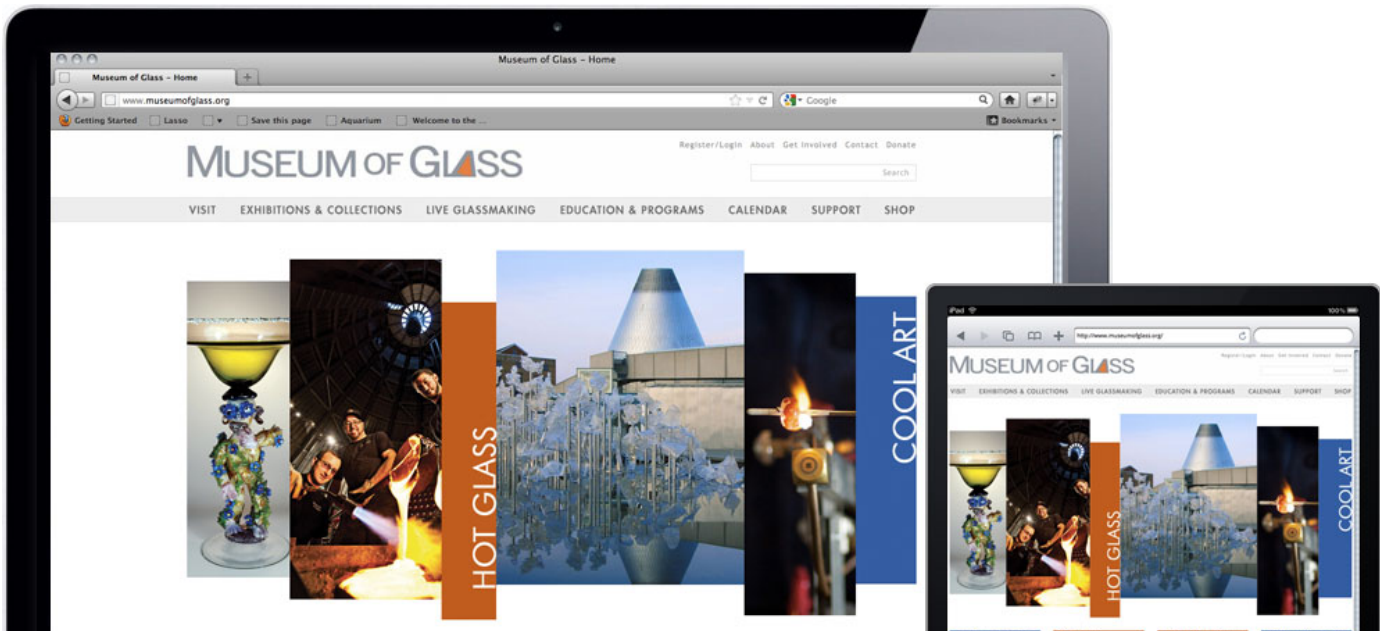
Science News for Kids: <http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/>

Chicago Architecture (mobile): <http://www.architecture.org/mobile>

“Let’s face it, your website does not exist as a boutique just to show off information about your organization. Instead, it’s actually a tool that you employed mobilize your audience...”

RAHEEL GAUBA

“Design for Good: 4 (More) Nonprofit Design Principles - Part 2 of 2”,
Netwits Think Tank, July 14, 2009



Have a focused homepage (first impression, five-second test)

Prioritize content
Remember your goals
Make it scan-able

Designers and clients often take for granted what visitors to their site will already know about their organization. Assume your audience has no previous experience with you or your mission. Your home page should pass the “five-second test” – could a user determine who you are and what you do after viewing your page for five seconds?

Pare down your homepage content and give a concise, yet clear and accurate taste of what you're about. Write down your top three goals and keep those goals at the forefront when designing your site and creating the content. Visual cues, like bright colors, negative space, and large typography help direct users to important, key messages.

Portfolio Examples

Museum of Glass: <http://www.museumofglass.org/> (pictured)
Portland Art Museum: <http://portlandartmuseum.org/>
GOProud: <http://www.goproud.org>

“The Web is a world of first impressions, and quick ones at that. Users form an opinion of a website within the first few seconds of loading it. This means that the colors, the layout and the presentation of headings are all evaluated before any content is actually absorbed. Users are inclined to scan content until they zero in on something that piques their interest.”

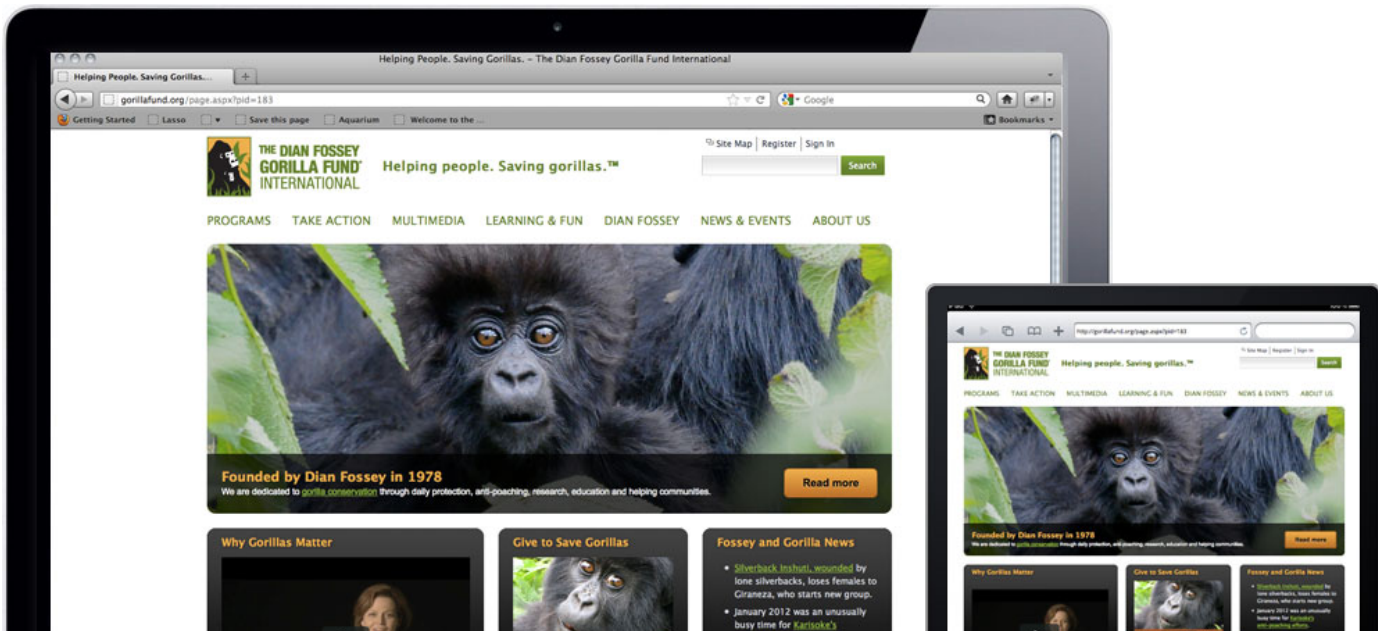
JASON GROSS

“The Role of Design in The Kingdom of Content,
www.smashingmagazine.com,
Oct. 24, 2011

“Good web design has a signature style: It’s approachable, it’s easy to understand, and it packs enough punch to catch the roving eye of even the most mercurial user”

BRONWYN HONES

“Better Writing Through Design.”, www.alistpart.com,
July 31, 2007



Share your mission

Tell your story clearly and succinctly
Represent your mission visually
Make your mission actionable for results

Your mission is the driving force of the work you do offline, and so should it be in your online presence. Users are quickly distracted online, so your mission should be forefront in all the content and images you use. Make it easy to read and highly visible on your homepage. Place an abbreviated mission statement right on the home page, or add a prominent link somewhere on the home page that takes visitors to an about page that offers concise, plain language (not “marketing-esque”) information about what the organization does.

Further, choose images that demonstrate your mission, create copy that not only conveys your mission, but also compels the user to do something about it. Donors also want to know immediately that you are a credible, worthwhile organization that both needs their support and will steward that money well. Show it to them!

Portfolio Examples

Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International: <http://gorillafund.org/> (pictured)
Medical Foundation of NC: <http://medicalfoundationofnc.org>
World Venture: <https://www.worldventure.com/>

“There are countless nonprofits out there who, given their limited impact, don’t really have a reason to exist. Don’t be one of them. If you can’t tell a compelling story about your organization and its mission, then perhaps you should reconsider what you’re doing or how you’re doing it.”

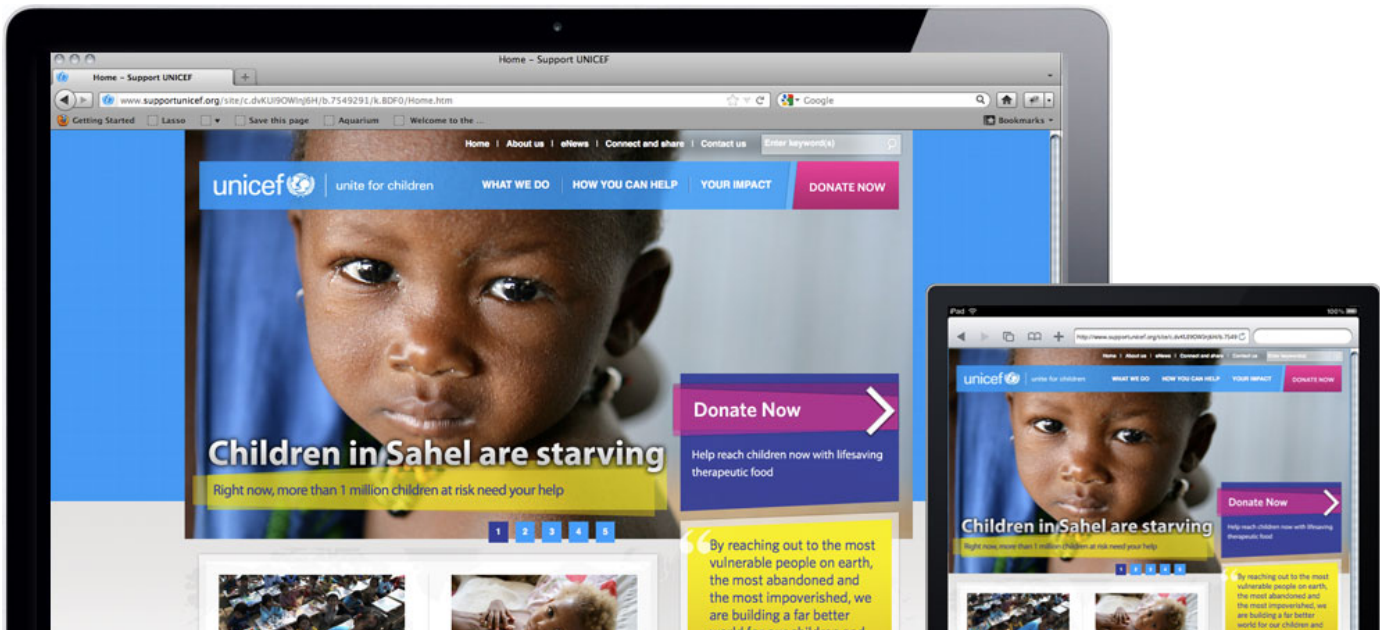
DAN HUTSON

“Is Your Nonprofit’s Story a Call to Action?”
www.pokethebeehive.com,
December 29, 2009

“Design your website around your non-profit’s actions and purpose. Make the mission statement clear as day.”

BLAKE MCCREARY

“Non-Profit Web Design.”
<http://blakemccreary.com>



Use compelling and engaging imagery

Engage with eye contact
Show real stories impacted by your work
Match imagery with your brand, mood, and voice

The difference between a good website and a great website is often the imagery used. Images resonate with people in a way that copy never can; after all, a picture speaks a 1,000 words. Be selective when choosing images for your site. Ask yourself: Does the image engage the user? Does it match your mission and further your goals? Does it showcase the need or benefits of your work?

If possible, use images of real people being served by your work. Make sure you have eye contact with the user, and match the image's mood to the mood and voice of your site. Serious images in a playful design create a disconnect for users and can lessen your credibility. After all, they're scanning your pages and making a judgment in less than 3 seconds.

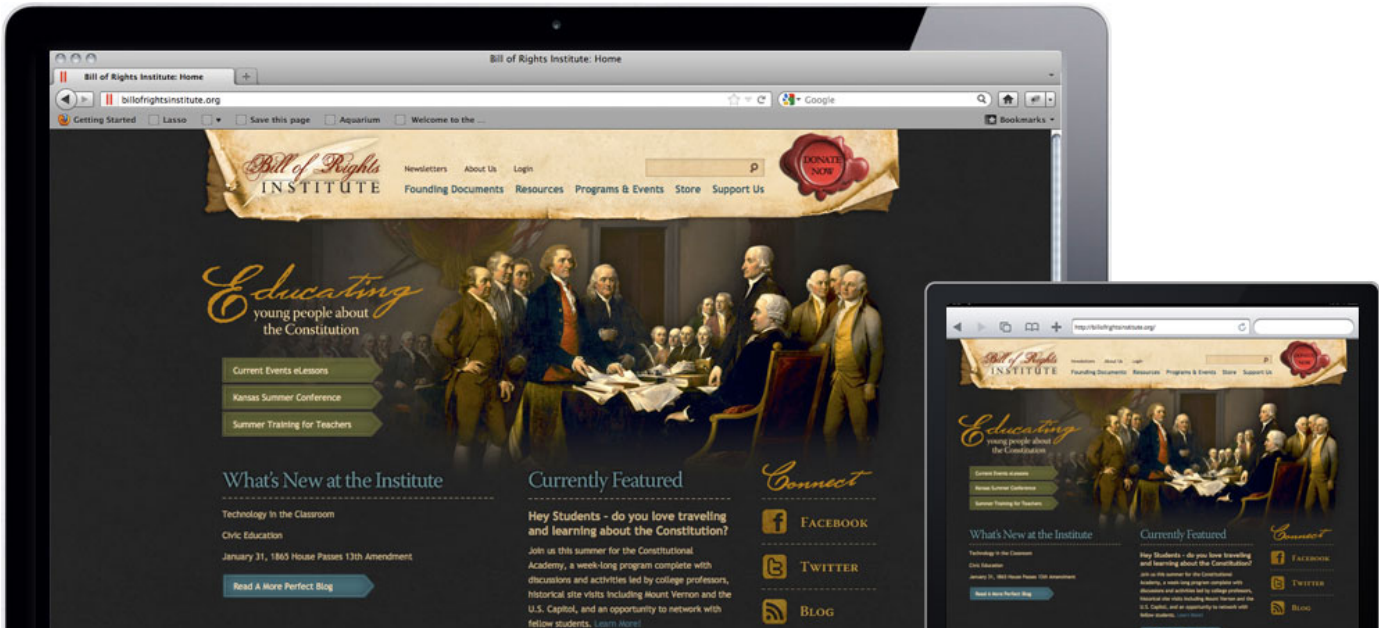
Portfolio Examples

UNICEF: <http://www.supportunicef.org/> (pictured)
Virginia Episcopal School: <http://www.ves.org/>
Louisiana SPCA: <http://la-sPCA.org/>

"Regardless of what your content actually says, the design around it controls what the users see first, and how their eyes move across the sections of the page."

JASON GROSS

"The Role of Design in The Kingdom of Content,
www.smashingmagazine.com,
Oct. 24, 2011



Make it easy to navigate

- Ensure two-clicks to anything
- Use short, clear, active language
- Provide multiple user paths

Your navigation is arguably the most important element on your site. It is, after all, how users get to know you, access the content of your site, and accomplish those goals that you set. Without good navigation, the user is confused, lost and quickly moves on to a site that is easy to navigation. Navigation systems need to be intuitive, precise, and easy-to-use.

There should also be webs – linear structures are not intuitive to all users, so make sure there are multiple paths to the same content or action by providing buttons, secondary navigation menus, and content-based calls-to-action. Cut your main navigation down to 5-7 concise, direct links that make the user want to learn more.

Portfolio Examples

- Bill of Rights: <http://billofrightsinstitute.org/> (pictured)
- Sister of Notre Dame: <http://www.ssndcentralpacific.org/>
- Medical Foundation of NC: <http://medicalfoundationofnc.org>
- Portland Art Museum: <http://portlandartmuseum.org/>

“Designing navigation is an art in itself. It’s all about using good information architecture: “the art of expressing a model or concept of information used in activities that require explicit details of complex systems.”

KAYLA KNIGHT

“Planning and Implementing Website Navigation,”
www.smashingmagazine.com,
June 6, 2011



Include clear, bold calls-to-action

Use effective language

Remove obstacles to action

Provide a tangible to the intangible

Now that you have a clear, focused home page and engaging, simple navigation, you need to compel your audience to take action. Provide your users with direct, clear calls-to-action. Use active language like “learn”, “give”, or “tour”. Remove obstacles and avoid unnecessary steps, such as excessive use of landing pages or login forms.

Link the intangible (donation, membership, volunteer) to a tangible benefit to show your users what they will gain or accomplish by taking action. For example, instead of asking them to “donate”, consider asking them to “give 10 meals to someone in need”. It helps those taking action link their intangible gift to something they feel will make an impact.

A call to action must be **clear and compelling**:

1. “Donate Now to save a gorilla”
2. “Tell Congress to stop child slavery.”

Portfolio Examples

Worldwide Orphan Foundation: <http://www.wwo.org/> (pictured)

The Writer’s Center: <http://www.writer.org/>

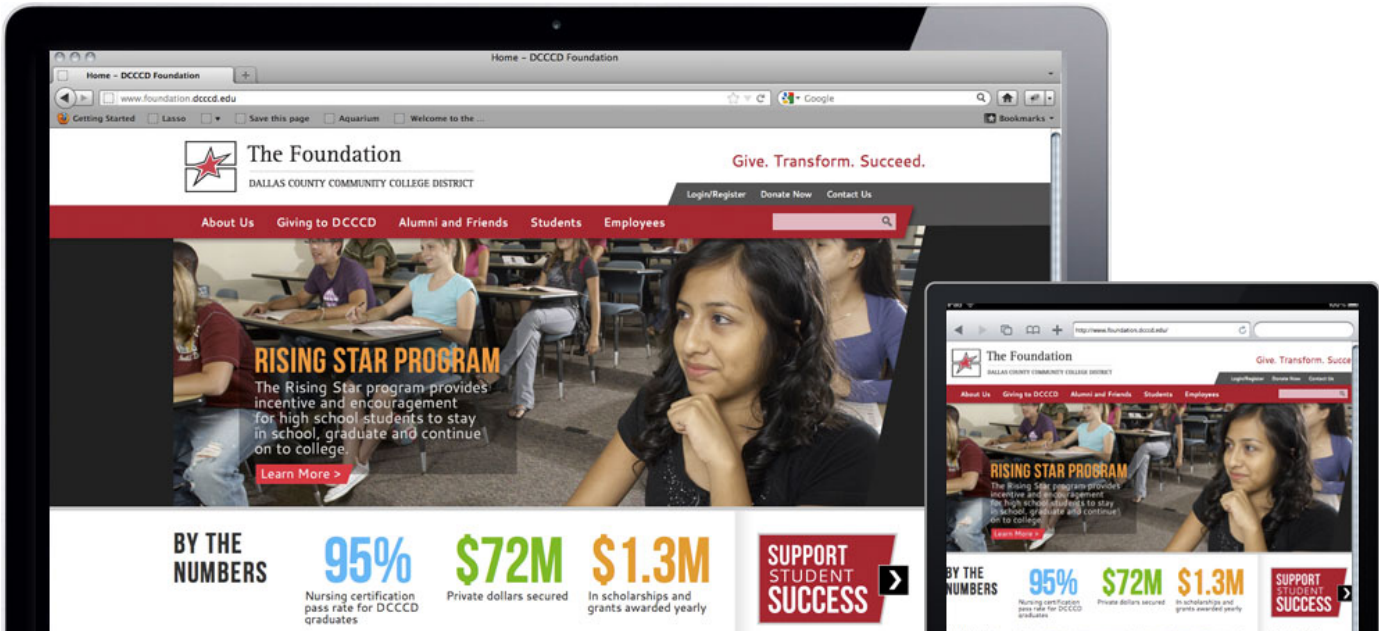
Habitat for Humanity Twin Cities: <http://www.tchabitat.org/>

“Assuming that you’ve written a brilliantly persuasive page, it’s still next to worthless without a strong call-to-action (CTA). It’s flat out wrong to assume that visitors will be so inspired by your brilliant copy that they will pick up the phone and call, or fill out an online form and beg you to contact them.”

BRAD SHORR

“Five Copywriting Errors That Can Ruin a Company’s Website,”

www.smashingmagazine.com,
June 29, 2011



Showcase your good stewardship

- Say thank you
- Show transparency
- Show the impact (statistics, accountability)

A study from Kellogg School of Business shows that 60% of donors visit a nonprofit’s website before making a gift. Donors are looking for credibility, accountability, and good stewardship from your organization before they’re willing to give.

They’re looking to learn how you’ll use their gifts, their time, or their resources. Use info graphics, charts or images to give a quick, visual impact. Tell them how their gifts impact your mission. Provide client success stories that lend a personal touch to your mission. Make your financial statements easy to access. When donors hear about the impact their dollars had from those directly impacted, they’ll be more satisfied with their impact and ultimately feel more involved.

Portfolio Examples

Dallas County Community College District Foundation:

<http://www.foundation.dcccd.edu/> (pictured)

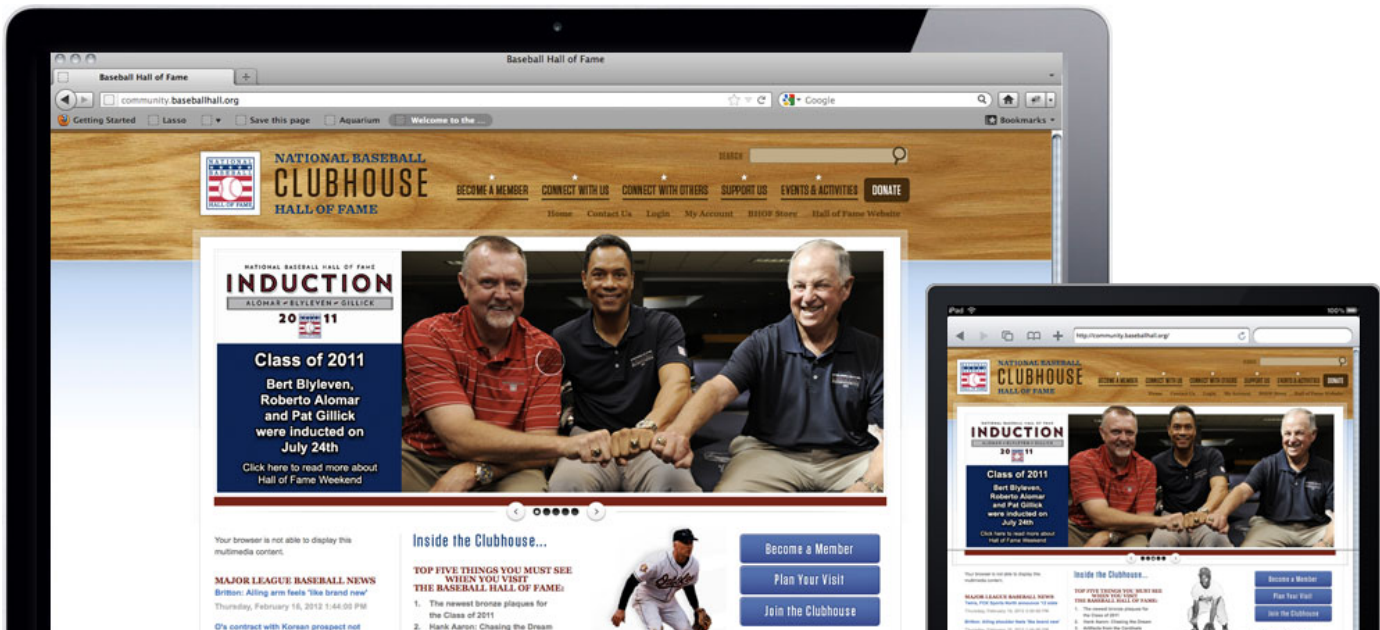
Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International: <http://gorillafund.org/>

UNICEF: <http://www.supportunicef.org/>

“Stewardship comes down to being able to show donors how their dollars were used and what impact their contributions had. Nonprofits that do this well are more likely to get repeat donations than those that do this poorly.”

CYNTHIA GOMEZ

“What Is Stewardship for a Non-Profit?” www.eHow.com , August 1, 2011



Keep content fresh

- Utilize automatic feeds
- Add dates to content posted on home page
- Use interactive elements

Your website should have something new to offer to your visitors on each visit. Otherwise, why would they come back? If, after investing all this time and money into strategy, content and design, you don't update your website frequently, your investment will decline. Users frequent websites that offer new content, stories and images – they come back because there is something new to learn, see and do. Add new, dated articles to show their timeliness. Use blogs, forums and communities to add user generated content and share comments in real time.

Portfolio Examples

National Baseball Hall of Fame Clubhouse: <http://community.baseballhall.org/>
(pictured)

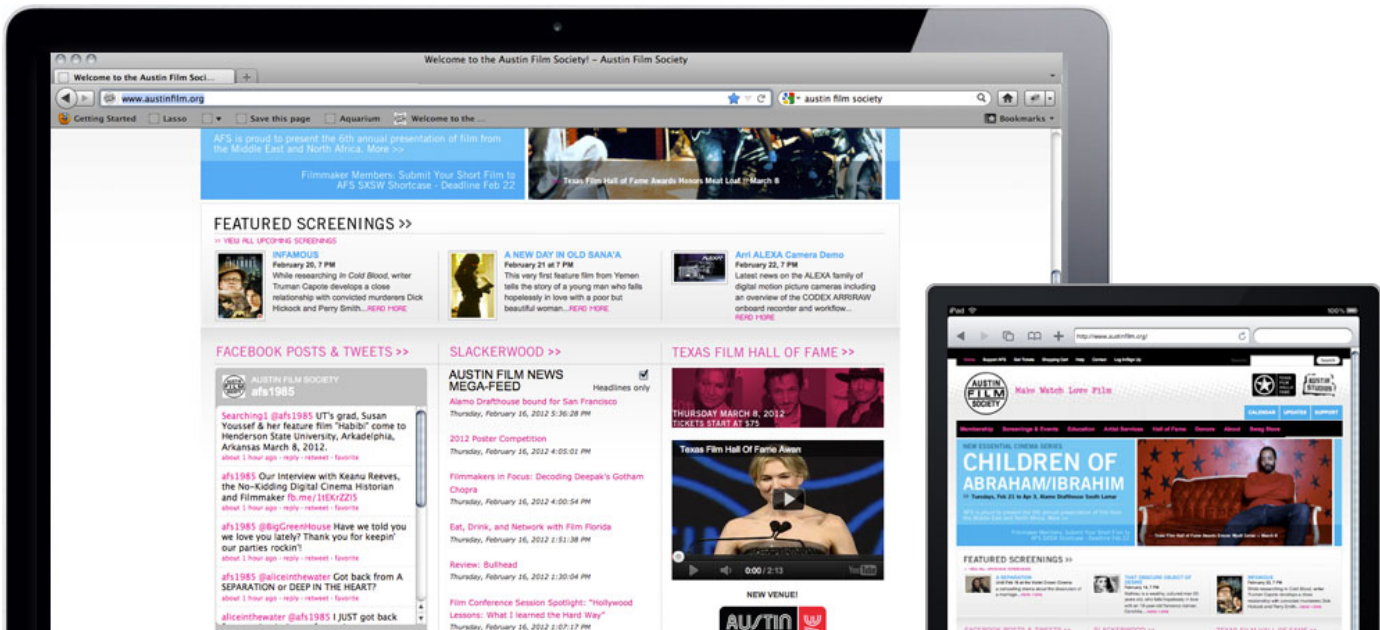
Louisiana SPCA: <http://la-sPCA.org/>

Austin Film Society: <http://www.austinfilm.org/>

"You should regularly change your website. You should update your site frequently—weekly or even daily is ideal—but no less than monthly. You need to remember that the Internet is a dynamic place, and make sure your site is constantly changing as well."

RANDALL MAINS

"Good Non Profit Website Design Principles #5 of 5,"
blog.pathmakermarketing.com
May 21, 2009



Be social

Encourage viral sharing
Showcase your social activities on your site
Make it easy to connect and comment

Social media and viral sharing are here to stay. They are highly valuable tools in contributing to web site traffic and brand exposure. Add links to your social media sites where users can find you where THEY are, not just on your website.

Social sharing is viral marketing at its finest. Encourage users to share the pages they like, content they learn, and actions they take. Every time a user shares your content on their social networks, that's hundreds of new exposures to your organization and all the wonderful things you do.

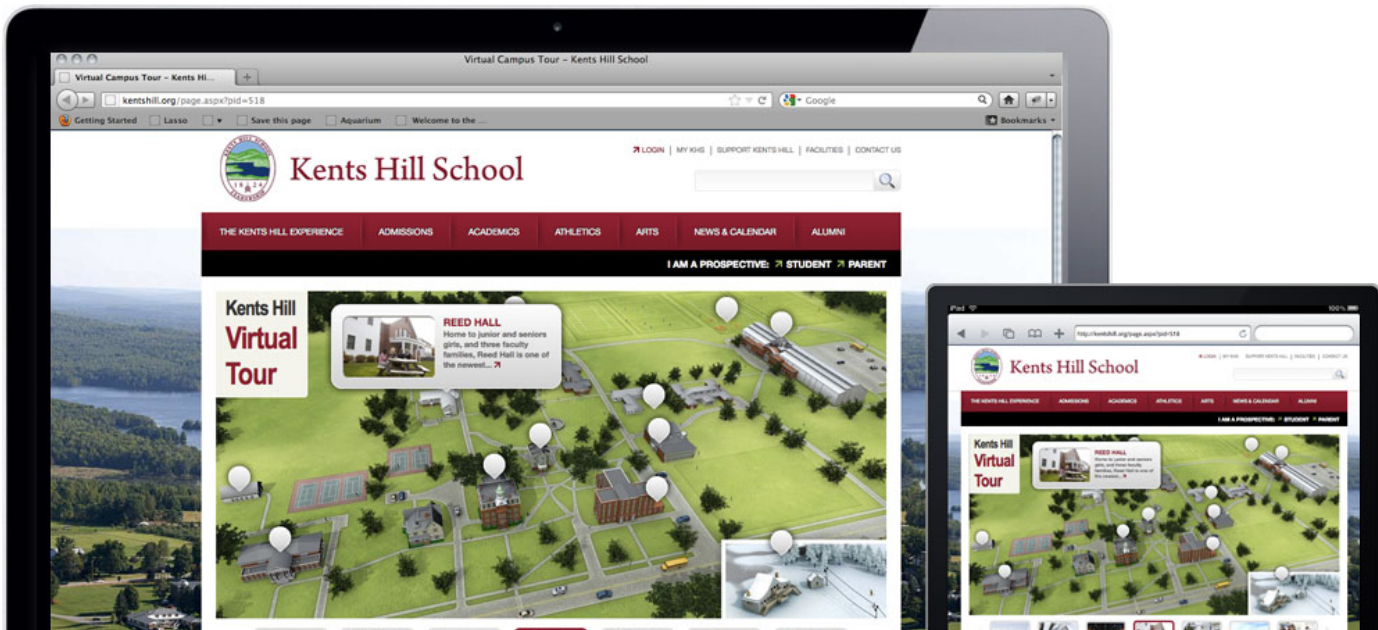
Portfolio Examples

Bill of Rights: <http://billofrightsinstitute.org/>
Walsingham Academy: <http://www.walsingham.org/>
Austin Film Society: <http://www.austinfilm.org/> (pictured)

"Integrating the social experience into your organization's web site will help promote the channel, engage supporters, and provide a constant source of dynamic content...When placed on a website or blog the latest updates will be displayed providing your visitors with fresh, current, useful content related to your mission."

MELANIE MATHOS & CHAD NORMAN

"101 Social Media Tactics for Nonprofits: A Field Guide."
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ. 2012, p 57



Provide a personal touch through digital media

Provide interactivity

Showcase constituent stories

Let constituents share via YouTube, Flickr and Blogs

Your audiences' media preferences vary, just as their browsing and navigation styles do. Users want to consume information in various channels and formats. If you can't be there in person, using video will allow you to provide a personal touch to your users. It also helps to fight donor fatigue by offering content in new, inspiring and interactive ways.

Whether you group multimedia content in a section of your site or drop it right up front on your homepage, the interactivity will draw in users and increase their emotional connection. Make sure the following accounts and information outlets are found on your site so users can interact with you on their terms: RSS Feed, Twitter account, YouTube channel, Facebook page, newsletter signup, newsletter archive, and your photo gallery.

Portfolio Examples

Kents Hill School Virtual Tour: <http://kentshill.org/page.aspx?pid=518> (pictured)

Kidney Foundation of Canada, Kidney TV: <http://www.kidney.ca/page.aspx?pid=411>

National Baseball Hall of Fame Clubhouse: <http://community.baseballhall.org/>

"Many of today's most successful websites are interactive, meaning they allow people to participate in the content in some way."

RANDALL MAINS

"Strategic Web Communication
Principle #4: Interactivity"
blog.pathmakermarketing.com
July 12, 2009

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Make sure your website resonates with your audience

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Provide a personal touch through digital media

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