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# An Update of Web Site Design

For Some Nonprofits, Web Sites Are Becoming Integral to Service Delivery

by David Goldstein

*In our Summer 1998 issue, David Goldstein covered in great detail the critical elements of designing a web site. In this article, he offers a brief update on the changing world of web design as well as an extensive list of resource web sites, some of which will be of special interest to nonprofit organizations.*

The dramatic increase in the number of world wide web users throughout the world, and the extent to which the web is being used personally and professionally, has enhanced the ability of the web to help nonprofits cut costs, provide more effective services, and operate more efficiently. The higher speeds at which people are accessing the web and the growing number of tools and site development options, which increase the power of web sites and can reduce development costs, make the web a tool that few organizations can afford to overlook.

As users come to expect more from commercial web sites, many nonprofits are under pressure not only to provide a web presence, but to develop web sites that meet those same expectations. Web sites are also being used to assist with agency marketing, fundraising, and operational goals. Today, the Internet is integral to the daily mission-driven activities of many nonprofits. For example, results of a member survey distributed by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network ([www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)) indicated that five percent of its members originally learned of the organization from its text-only web site. In response, the group upgraded its site to include timely news, an online bookstore, and conference registration forms. Now, with 400 visitors a day, the organization is better serving its constituents.<sup>1</sup>

If you are considering creating a new web site or revising the one you already have, many new options exist given the new trends in functionality, overall design, site automation, and site publicity. This doesn't mean you should add all of these to your organization's site—that should be determined by your organization's objectives. The following list should help you help frame your analysis and decide what options best meet your needs.

## Functionality

Most of the early commercial web sites were little more than electronic brochures with a feedback form that readers used to request more information. Today, many business functions can be incorporated into web sites to meet client expectations, reduce costs, and improve office efficiency, including:

- Direct organization services to clients
- Agency news
- Electronic shopping services
- Fundraising and development services
- Advocacy and political action

Probably the most significant development in the world of commercial web sites is the growth of electronic commerce. Along with people's willingness to purchase products online using credit cards has come a willingness to contribute money electronically. It is no surprise then that a growing number of nonprofits are going beyond just placing feedback forms and fundraising pitches on their sites and are instead focusing their attention on using their sites to raise funds. Web sites are incorporating a number of techniques to either encourage direct electronic contributions or

build prospecting lists of people to be solicited through more traditional means.

## Design and Content

If you notice that many sites have a similar look and feel, that's because there is a growing body of knowledge as to what constitutes effective design and content. Some of the more important design elements being used today include:

- The use of news sections and news/hot items on the home page to keep sites fresh and encourage users to keep returning
- Fast-loading pages
- Easy to understand link structures and other navigation elements
- More effective copy in the areas of marketing, selling, and fundraising
- Use of interactive tools such as discussion groups and chats to encourage users to use of the site
- Online subscriptions to electronic newsletters, which provide information about the organization or web site
- Home pages with basic information and links that require as little scrolling as possible and easy to understand
- New features that make it easy and inexpensive to update the web site
- Resource lists
- Better designed search engines. Content and design elements affect rankings on various search engines (as do hidden elements such as meta tags) so many sites are being designed to maximize those rankings. For example, doorway pages, special pages that are designed to take advantage of individual search engines, are being used more frequently.
- Use of scripts and programming to automate the updating of many site features and provide users with easier, more

effective access to site information. This includes the use of database technology to automatically create web pages.

### Site Automation

Today many sites are making use of various programs and scripts to automate elements of their sites. These serve several important functions: they make the site much more useful and can often save the organization money over the long run by reducing the amount of manual labor needed to respond to inquiries or process data.

Before you hire a programmer to make these changes for you, you should explore software packages, shareware, freeware, ISP services, and free script archives, which are sometimes less expensive alternatives. Regardless of which route you take to automating your organization's web site, here are some features to consider:

- Various forms of password protection to restrict parts of the site to certain users
- Site search engines that allow users to enter keywords and find appropriate pages on the site
- Programs that take information provided in online forms and return information to the user, provide some sort of function, or automatically store information in a database
- Use of cookies to store information about users on their hard drive and use that information on subsequent visits to the site
- News update programs that allow for news sections or home pages to be updated via information entered into a form or database
- The ability to display different versions of a site depending on the browser and platform a visitor is using
- Electronic shopping and credit card transactions, including online auctions

### Site Publicity

It's well known in the web world: If you build it, they will not necessarily come. With millions of web sites in existence, it

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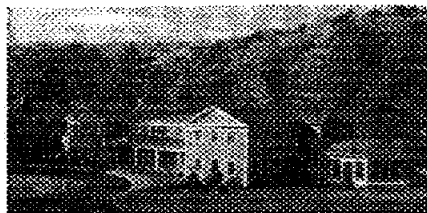
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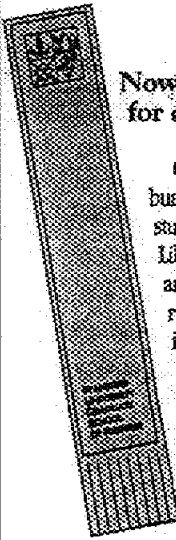
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**Now you can get a great looking, long-lasting recognition gift  
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Caps, tote, Frisbees, magnets, bumper stickers...are these the stuff that memories are made of? Like their new owners these gifts are here today and gone tomorrow. But don't lose heart! There is one gift that won't get stuffed into the back of a closet until it finds its way into a rummage sale. In fact, this inexpensive, little gift recently helped pave the way for a \$2 million donation to a new building.

**A custom-designed leather bookmark.**

Leather bookmarks are lovely mementos that even smell elegant. They keep more than just a place in your donor's books. A high-quality leather bookmark customized with your logo holds a place in their hearts.

**Donors are readers**

When you present your supporters with a custom designed leather bookmark, you're giving them an elegant keepsake that is useful too. Most of your donors probably have a good book going. By placing your bookmark

between its pages, they will be continually reminded of your organization.

**101 ways to make an impression**

A leather bookmark is so versatile. With its low purchase price, it makes an excellent gift that fits into a standard business envelope. Don't limit yourself to high-end donors; this year's \$20 donation could double next year with the right incentive. You can slip a bookmark into a vest pocket or handbag, making it a handy yet attractive give-away at an exclusive dinner or other cultivation event for major prospects. Bookmarks go beyond purely fund-raising; they are used in orientation packets by reunion organizers, trainers, conference planners, and even "short course" administrators.

Too handsome to throw away, your leather bookmark becomes a tool for advancement that will work hard for you well into the future.

You can get more details by contacting Ameropean Corporation, 7 Corporate Dr., #109, North Haven, CT 06473. Tel: 203-239-0448.

If you send them your logo, they'll even prepare a layout for you and send you a typical free sample.

is becoming more and more difficult to draw attention to a web site. Thus, a large part of the design and content considerations must be geared to drawing targeted users to the site and to using the site in a way that best meets organization goals. The good news is that there are a growing number of options available online and offline to publicize a site, many of which are targeted to narrowly defined user groups. The bad news? More time and money must be spent and more expertise is needed to promote a site as effectively as possible.

Search engines remain a high priority, but because of the increasing number of sites and the ever-changing rules for listing and ranking, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many sites to be listed high enough to get noticed on specific engines (despite what those guaranteeing top ten rankings say). Again, site developers must spend more time and often more money to maximize rankings where possible, but they should consider other options, as well, including:

- Use of other offline promotional materials such as stationary, brochures, newsletters, promotional spots, and press releases to promote the site
- Promotions and contests featured on and off the web
- Registering with smaller general and more specialized search engines and listings. In fact, several new and existing resource sites are geared specifically to nonprofits. (See the Resource List for a list of these sites)
- Using online publicity and marketing sites
- Using existing newsgroups and discussion lists
- Using reciprocal linkings on other sites
- Seeking site awards and recognition
- Use of resource listings and other informational materials on the site to draw users
- Developing electronic newsletters and discussion lists
- Using email for announcements and updates about the organization and web site

## Resource List

Here are links to resources that will help you stay on top of how the web is being used, as well as the many tools and resources available for developing and marketing your organization's web site.

### MAJOR SEARCH ENGINES

- Yahoo ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com))
- Infoseek ([www.infoseek.com](http://www.infoseek.com))
- Excite ([www.excite.com](http://www.excite.com))
- Lycos ([www.lycos.com](http://www.lycos.com))
- WebCrawler ([www.webcrawler.com](http://www.webcrawler.com))
- HotBot ([www.hotbot.com](http://www.hotbot.com))
- Cnet Search.com ([www.search.com](http://www.search.com))
- Alta Vista ([www.altavista.com](http://www.altavista.com))
- DejaNews ([www.dejanews.com](http://www.dejanews.com))
- AOL NetFind ([www.aolnetfind.com](http://www.aolnetfind.com))
- Netscape Search ([www.netscape.com](http://www.netscape.com))
- Snap ([www.snap.com](http://www.snap.com))
- Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com))
- Internet Scout ([scout.cs.wisc.edu/scout/index.html](http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/scout/index.html))
- Microsoft Network ([www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com))

### WEB MARKETING, COMMERCE, DESIGN AND USE

- Wilson Internet Services ([www.wilsonweb.com](http://www.wilsonweb.com))
- Marketing Resource Center ([www.marketingresource.com](http://www.marketingresource.com))
- Web Sites that Suck ([www.websiteshatsuck.com](http://www.websiteshatsuck.com))
- Internet Marketing Center ([www.marketingtips.com](http://www.marketingtips.com))
- ZDNet E-Commerce ([www.zdnet.com/enterprise/e-business/](http://www.zdnet.com/enterprise/e-business/))
- eMarketer ([www.e-land.com](http://www.e-land.com))
- Internet Marketing Association ([www.internetmarketing.org](http://www.internetmarketing.org))
- Web Developer Magazine ([www.webdeveloper.com](http://www.webdeveloper.com))

### Internet World

- ([www.internetworld.com](http://www.internetworld.com))
- Web Review ([www.webreview.com](http://www.webreview.com))
- Web Techniques ([www.webtechniques.com](http://www.webtechniques.com))
- Advertising Age Interactive ([www.adage.com/interactive](http://www.adage.com/interactive))
- Browser Watch ([www.browserwatch.com](http://www.browserwatch.com))
- Web Developer's Library ([www.stars.com](http://www.stars.com))
- ZD Net Devhead ([www.zdnet.com/devhead](http://www.zdnet.com/devhead))
- Internet.com WebReference ([www.webreference.com](http://www.webreference.com))
- NUA Internet Surveys ([www.nua.ie/surveys/](http://www.nua.ie/surveys/))
- Search Engine Watch ([www.searchenginewatch.com](http://www.searchenginewatch.com))
- Web Developer's Journal ([www.webdevelopersjournal.com](http://www.webdevelopersjournal.com))
- Ultimate Webmaster Resource ([www.htmldirectory.com](http://www.htmldirectory.com))

### SOFTWARE & SCRIPTS

- CGI Directory ([www.cgidir.com](http://www.cgidir.com))
- Gamelan Java Applets ([www.gamelan.com](http://www.gamelan.com))
- Stroud's Winsock Applications ([www.stroud.com](http://www.stroud.com))
- CGI Index ([www.dodge.co.uk/cgiindex/](http://www.dodge.co.uk/cgiindex/))
- Java Boutique ([javaboutique.internet.com/](http://javaboutique.internet.com/))
- ZD Net Script Library ([www.zdnet.com/devhead/resources/scriptlibrary/](http://www.zdnet.com/devhead/resources/scriptlibrary/))
- Shareware.com ([www.shareware.com](http://www.shareware.com))
- Tucows.com ([www.tucows.com](http://www.tucows.com))
- Download.com ([www.download.com](http://www.download.com))

Softseek.com ([www.softseek.com](http://www.softseek.com))

### NONPROFIT WEB NEWS

- Nonprofit Times ([www.nptimes.com](http://www.nptimes.com))
- Chronicle of Philanthropy ([www.philanthropy.com](http://www.philanthropy.com))
- Internet Online News ([www.gilbert.org/gilbert](http://www.gilbert.org/gilbert))
- Philanthropy Journal Online ([www.pj.org](http://www.pj.org))

### PUBLICIZING YOUR NONPROFIT WEB SITE OR AGENCY

- Impact Online ([www.impactonline.org](http://www.impactonline.org))
- Action without Borders ([www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org))
- American Philanthropy Review ([www.charitychannel.com](http://www.charitychannel.com))
- Philanthropy Search ([www.philanthropysearch.com](http://www.philanthropysearch.com))
- Usenet Nonprofit Newsgroup ([soc.org.nonprofit](http://soc.org.nonprofit))

### E-COMMERCE SITE DONATING PORTIONS TO CHARITY

- Igive ([www.igive.com](http://www.igive.com))
- WebCharity.com ([www.webcharity.com](http://www.webcharity.com))
- GreaterGood.com ([www.greatergood.com](http://www.greatergood.com))
- Charity Mail ([www.charitymail.com](http://www.charitymail.com))
- 4Charity.com ([www.4charity.com](http://www.4charity.com))
- Shop 2 Give ([www.shop2give.com](http://www.shop2give.com))
- MyCause.com ([www.mycase.com](http://www.mycase.com))

In addition to promoting the site, more attention should be paid to evaluating promotional efforts. Analyzing referrer information from log files (information collected automatically that indicates which search engine or site the users came from) and asking via online forms and other marketing materials where users heard about the site are just two examples.

## Conclusion

Nonprofit agencies, always striving to improve agency effectiveness and hold the line on costs, are turning in greater

numbers toward the Internet and World Wide Web to accomplish those goals. As more of the public is making use of the web in everyday activities, and as more agencies are responding with better sites, it is imperative for agencies to get serious about the web in order to remain both effective and competitive in terms of offering services, raising funds, and promoting agency activities. An important part of that process is to stay on top of web site development trends; with the information provided in this article, you should have a good idea of where to start. ■

### End Note

- 1 Chronicle of Philanthropy, Oct. 8, 1998.

### About the Author

David M. Goldstein is president of the TMD Group, a company that offers a full range of computer and marketing services, including web site development and marketing. He is also president of the Technology Education Center, in Providence, Rhode Island, a nonprofit dedicating to helping the public, government, and nonprofit sector make better use of computer and other information technology.