



Appendix C: Best Practices for Developing a Website

Website Presentation and First Impressions

First impressions are always important. An effective website should strive to give an impression of usefulness, clarity, ease-of-use, efficiency, and openness. Users will be lost if the website does not a) look professional; b) function in an efficient and effective way; and c) appear attractive. Here are some items to consider:

Load time of the home page: The most important factor in conveying an efficient impression is download time. A user will only wait so long for a page to download.

Home page on one screen (no scrolling required, also known as “above the fold”: Users entering the site will appreciate seeing everything in front of them without having to make the effort of scrolling up and down. It is essential that the home page is clear and simple. Note that the amount of home page displayed is dependent on the screen resolution of the viewing device. A mobile-ready website (using responsive web design) automatically adjusts the view based on the device.

Readability: Pages should be readable, clear, and easy to understand. It is important that the site not be too cluttered with text and images. Multimedia elements (pictures, graphics, videos, and the like) should be used sparingly and for specific purposes; be careful to ensure that they are not distracting. In general, there is a trade-off between graphics and performance. Therefore, graphics should be used sparingly. Graphics used should add to the functionality of the website. The font size needs to be large enough to be readable, and clashing colors should be avoided.

Ability to take action: The site should be interactive and encourage user participation from the outset. Direct links to key action points should be immediately visible on the home page; for example, a link to the provider search functionality.

Contact and feedback details: Providing immediate contact details such as e-mail addresses and telephone numbers on the home page will give the site an open feel and add a personal touch, thus increasing user confidence and trust in the site. Consider including a section for customers or users to give opinions.

Software download: Asking users to download an application or a plug-in before entering a site can cause annoyance and confusion, hence driving them away. This should be avoided.

Navigation and Search

Navigation facilitates movement from one page to another. Sites often provide “previous” and “next” buttons, a “home” button, and other tools to ensure that their content is easily accessible through a variety of paths.

Successful websites offer users an easy way to navigate their content. Effective websites are laid out in a way that is logical and does not confuse users. A site with excellent content and facilities will be wasted if users cannot find and access the information or facilities they want.

Here are some items to consider:



Navigation links on the home or landing page (on the left side or top): A good website highlights the navigation links when users roll their mouse over them.

Consistency (system-wide standards): When a website introduces a user to a navigation system up front, the user expects it to apply throughout the whole site, without exception. A consistent navigation system, such as a navigation menu bar, should be used throughout the site. There should be consistent text or button links on each page.

How the information is displayed: Headings should have different font formatting (bold, italic, size, and color) than the general content.

Content: Text should get straight to the point and be informative. Avoid the use of jargon.

Ability to find information: Follow the “three-click rule”—users should be able to find any information with no more than three mouse clicks.

Ease of use: The navigation system should be intuitive and easy to use, providing direct access to various content areas and facilities on the site. Users need to be able to make an informed decision about which path to take.

Internal links: These allow users to move through the site not only through a navigation system but also through the content itself. This allows users to navigate through the site following the natural progression of the content.

Return to home page (from any page): Constantly providing a link back to the home page is essential to ensuring that users do not get lost and feel more secure navigating the site.

Internal search engine: An internal search facility provides users with a means of finding what they want on the website quickly and efficiently. This is especially important for large sites with a substantial amount of content.

Working Links: Ensure that there are no broken links or error messages, such as “page not found.” Sites that are not regularly updated are likely to have more broken links. All links should be continuously tested to ensure that they are working. Broken links will frustrate users and give an unprofessional impression.

Text as well as graphic links (alt tags): Graphics may not convey immediate meaning to some users, so providing additional text links is important. Alternative (alt) tags on images accommodate the visually impaired and can boost the site’s ranking with some search engines.

Site map: A site map is a file that lists the webpages included in your site. Site maps tell search engines and users about the content of the site. They make it easier to understand what is included in the site and offer an alternative method of navigating the site.

Website Content

The majority of the content required on state and territory consumer education websites will be outlined as part of the CCDF requirements. The following are some tips for how the content should be presented.

Easily accessible: Content should be easy to access and find. It should follow a natural progression and allow users to move at their own direction and pace. Therefore, an effective navigation system is required. Content should be “chunked”; that is, broken up into easily digestible chunks. Pages that are composed only of scrolling text should be avoided. An internal search tool is also a key element in making a site’s content easily accessible.

Well presented: Content should be well presented through the appropriate use of text, graphics, and animation. It is important to use text, graphics, and animation as cleverly as possible to enhance the presentation while not taking too much from the site’s performance.



Level of interaction: The web is especially tailored to presenting content through the use of text, graphics, and animation, offering huge potential to convey content to users. Websites should take advantage of this great opportunity to interact with users by being as interactive as possible.

Use of valuable graphics and videos: Graphics and video clips should add value to the website rather than reduce performance without providing any real benefit to the user. Video clips should not require additional plugins to view content.

Up-to-date information: All content published should be recent and up to date.

Available in multiple languages: Making the site's content available in multiple languages will make the information accessible to a wider range of people.

Accessibility for disabled people: It is highly important that the site accommodates those with visual and auditory disabilities.

FAQs: Frequently asked questions (FAQs) can introduce a site's content to an unfamiliar user quickly.

Availability of follow-up discussion: The website should provide a means to engage in a discussion.

Technical Considerations

Responsive web design: In the last few years, the number of smart devices (smartphones, phablets and tablets, and smartwatches) has exceeded the number of desktop computers in use. This change in behavior has propelled a concept in website development called responsive web design, which allows web content to be viewed on a range of smart devices. On websites designed with this approach, pages and content automatically adjust to fit the screen size of users' devices. Here is a simple way to confirm that a site is mobile-friendly using your desktop computer: resize your web browser from full screen to a window. The website content should realign as the window is resized.

Sharing resources (use and integration of social media): The ability to connect to different social media platforms to share details and information is important to many users. In some cases, users might not use email to communicate or archive resources.

Printing resources: The ability to print (and forward) resources from a website is important. For example, the ability to print an inspection report can be very helpful.

Additional Areas

Website findability: Attracting those surfing the web ("surfers") is a fundamental part of having an effective website. The effectiveness of a website is highly dependent on getting surfers to the site and converting these surfers to users. There are many ways of attracting surfers to a site, including the following:

- ◆ Search engines
- ◆ Partner sites and affiliates
- ◆ Recommendations
- ◆ URL branding



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