



LGT

FINANCIAL FOCUS



Lane Gorman Trubitt, L.L.P.
Accountants & Advisors

Your Accounting for a New Economy

Curiouser and Curiouser: How Website Usability Impacts Donations

In the Lewis Carroll classic Alice's Adventures in Wonderland Alice finds herself lost in a fantastic world with only a mentally unstable cast of characters to show her the way. When she asks them for advice, they often use circular logic to contradict each other (or themselves), before advising her to go in the wrong direction. Leaving her discontented, confused and more lost than she was before.

Unfortunately, a poorly designed website can have the same effect for your online visitors and result in the loss of valuable donations and support for your important cause.

Nielsen recently conducted a study that gauged the effectiveness and impact of websites for not-for-profit organizations and found that almost half (47%) had major usability problems. They estimated that by spending some time to work out the communication kinks and providing the information sought after by online philanthropists, nonprofit organizations could increase donations by 10% or more!

So, how do you start?

In the words of the King of Hearts, "Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop."

Provide a Map

Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to

Alice: I don't much care where.

Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

For too many not-for-profits their online presence is an afterthought and this is made all too clear in the design of their webpage. Your webpage is the “looking glass” through which online visitors learn about your organization. Often this is the first thing people will see. It’s important to make a good impression.

A great deal of time and consideration must be given to your layout. Be sure to highlight the information most important to both your visitors and your organization. For your organization this means having prominent links to information on your mission and your donation page.

But what are your visitors looking for?

The same Nielson study showed that the vast majority of online visitors wanted to find information on:

- Your Mission
- Your Goals
- Your Objectives
- Local Work
- Specifics on How Donations are Used

Nielson found that only 4% of nonprofit websites addressed all the topics most important to their online visitors. This can give your organization a real advantage in the donations race.

Just remember, providing the information is only the first step. The second is ensuring they can find it when they’re looking for it.

Clear Content

Eaglet: Speak English! I don’t know the meaning of half those long words, and I don’t believe you do either!

When crafting the content for you website it’s important that you not only address the topics most important to your online visitors, but that you also state it in a clear and concise fashion.

Remember that your audience may not be as informed on your mission as you are. Write it in a way that will be easily understandable to anyone who has happened upon your site even if they have no previous knowledge of what you do.

In their study Nielson discovered that more than half, 53% of the websites surveyed, contained unclear content, missing information and confusing terminology. Just as Alice becomes angry when she doesn’t understand something, nothing will kill a potential donation faster than confusing your donor.

Consistency

Alice: I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir, because I'm not myself, you see.

If your organization is part of a larger national organization or if your organization has many different chapters within it, it's important to maintain a consistency across all websites. This provides your virtual visitors with confidence that you are all part of the same organization, and are all working towards the same goals and ideals.

It can be very disconcerting for a visitor who visits the national site and then follows a link to the local site to see what work is being done in their neighborhood only to discover that the local site looks completely different.

It's always a good idea to give all the sites associated with your organization the same look in order to provide consistency. In marketing this is called branding, and it has become an important facet for almost every successful company.

The Moral

The Duchess: Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it.

At the end of the day, the most important thing to keep in mind when designing your online presence is what you yourself like to see when you visit other websites. You want to be able to find what you're looking for with easy links right on the front page. You want to have access to clear answers to the questions you have. And you want an easy way to help if you are inspired to give.

By following these simple rules of thumb any not-for-profit can improve their online presence which can lead to more donations.

For more information on LGT's not-for-profit group contact your trust advisor or David Ovesen the partner-in-charge of the not-for-profit group at (214) 461-1443 or by email at dovesen@lgt-cpa.com.