



Essential features of an association website

Websites have become arguably one of the most important tools for many associations. From keeping members updated with the latest news and information through to providing a host of resources for them to use, a good website can make the difference between members renewing their subscriptions or not. Don't risk losing any of your members with a substandard website by following our hints and advice before you plan your next association website.

1. Content management system

A content management system (CMS) is a software programme that allows you update your website via an interface. As we're not all technical experts, a CMS allows 'non-technical' users to take back control of their website.

Having a good CMS is important as it will mean that not only are updates quick and easy to make, but also that you are more likely to use it. This means that your site is kept alive and fresh, which is important if you want members to use it properly.

2. Email broadcast tools

A good email broadcast tool allows 'non-technical' administrators to deliver powerful, highly visual, personalised bulk communications to members in an easy manner.

By ensuring your website has good capabilities in this area, you can be proactive in communicating regularly with members and other stakeholders. You don't need to wait for

them to visit the website, you can get in touch with them and drive event participation and membership renewals.

3. Database segmentation

Good databases allow you to identify and select a group of people that share similar characteristics such as by location, job function or area of interest. Web based databases allow you to deliver tailored communications to these specific groups which are likely to be of far more interest to them, potentially increasing their success rate significantly.

4. Online payments

If your association needs to take online payments with its website, then it will require a 'payment gateway' to facilitate the automated and secure transfer of money between accounts. These gateways integrate with order processing functions to maximise automation of the transaction.

Your association may be nervous about setting up an online payment facility but it's important to remember that it can provide members with a number of benefits such as quick, easy and worry free purchasing at any time of the day. If you do decide to go down this route, be sure to provide users with clear instructions on the buying process and make getting started simple and straightforward to encourage its use.

5. Automated transactions and invoicing

Good online systems contain an orders area where members can review and process their transactions. Invoices can be automatically generated and financial details can also be automatically exported into spreadsheets or accounts software packages.

6. Online forms

Many websites now include a range of common forms such as contact us, join, and renew so that members can easily interact with you. Forms capture the details of the enquiry and then email the details to you. You can also populate your contacts database with people who have contacted you via one of your online forms.

To help visitors when they are filling in forms, try to minimise their workload by avoiding data duplication and auto completing forms from your database wherever possible.

7. Community conversations

Forums, blogs and other features that include the facility for members to comment and offer an opinion can be an incredibly powerful, useful and cost-effective tool. If introducing any of

these, it's important to remember that these often require a degree of moderation to ensure standards and proper use.

Providing a community platform where your members can interact with each other can create a powerful buzz, help develop relationships and drive event bookings and event membership.

8. Event bookings & management

If your association regularly hosts or organises events, then it's a good idea to allow your members to book their places automatically via the website.

Depending upon how sophisticated you want the system to be, event booking functions can reduce manual processing significantly and even automatically integrate aspects such as table allocations or CPD point tracking. This can be a win-win situation as it reduces your workload and provides increased convenience for members.

9. Fully integrated membership databases

A fully integrated membership database can revolutionise the way your association is managed and allows for highly customised levels of personalisation from aspects such as communications, CPD tracking and offers through to differential pricing.

10. Analytics and tracking

It's important to regularly review your website analytics to see how many people are using the website, where they are going to and what areas needs improving.

When making any changes to your website, it's important to gather both statistical and qualitative feedback from members before carrying out the work and then comparing this afterwards to ensure that changes have had a positive impact.