

5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION WEBSITE NON-NEGOTIABLES





Do you know your website could use some improvements, but you aren't sure where to start?

Maybe it's been a few (or, a LOT) of years since the design on your website has been updated. And your content could use an extra boost too.

It's so important to regularly update your website — you could be missing out on opportunities and leads because your website is out of date!

So, which of the following categories are you in when it comes to making updates to your website?



- Maybe you haven't been able to sufficiently justify the need to get money in the budget to make changes.
- Or, if you do have money in the budget, you don't know where to begin and you feel overwhelmed.
- Or, if you DO know where to begin, you want to make sure you're doing it right! So you need to know exactly what works for Economic Development Organizations' websites.

In this guide, we'll clarify the top 5 non-negotiables for your Economic Development website — so you can focus on the priorities that create better results!

The Two Top Goals of Your Economic Development Organization

Let's start by clarifying the two primary goals of Economic Development Organizations...

The two top goals are:

- Attracting investments into your community, and getting people that want to locate or expand in your area to see the your organization as the solution to their problems.
- Attracting and retaining a talented workforce to fill all of the jobs your businesses need filled.



It's your website's job to help you achieve these goals! And the keys in this guide will get you started.

First, your website needs to create a powerful perception of the benefits of living and working in your community.

One powerful way to do that is through telling your organization's story!

KEY #1: TELL YOUR ORGANIZATION'S STORY

Many Economic Development Organizations face the challenge of shifting perceptions about their community. However, you have a lot of power over someone's perception of your community. It's through the stories you tell that people are able to get a NEW idea of the opportunities truly available in your community.

So how do you do tell your stories in powerful ways?

1 Share your story creatively on your website using different mediums, like:

- Text
- Photos
- Videos



2 Tell your story in creative ways, like:

- Share testimonials from business owners who can sing the praises of working and living in your town. Whether it's a video testimonial, a photo and quote, or simply some text, testimonials can go a long way to shift perceptions.
- Include a variety of images — both inside businesses of people working, and scenery and landscapes showing the town is a beautiful place to live with a high quality of life.
- Got available land and vacant buildings? Focus on business attraction. Tell stories of people eager to work — and places they can call “home”!
- Focusing on business retention? Highlight the services your organization offers that help them with their issues.
- Tell stories that can handle workforce issues, transportation, and permitting needs.
- Handle local, federal, and state challenges through telling the story of your business community as an advocate and resource.
- Highlight entrepreneurial talent and the available workforce you have in your community.

3 Improve the visuals of your storytelling through photography and videography – no matter what your budget is!

So often people use stock images because it's easy, but real photos and video footage of your town are better! And you can do this whether you've got a low, medium, or large budget!

Low or No Budget



- Use a smartphone to take footage of local businesses, landscapes, and scenery. With apps like Instagram you can easily use filters to help your images go from amateur to professional-looking!
- Visit your local community college. Do they have a photography class? You can hire a photography intern who could take photos of your town in exchange for building up their portfolio.

Mid or High Budget



- A long-term goal could be to get professionally produced videos and photographs. Enter into an annual agreement with them so you can cover all seasons: summer, fall, winter, and spring.
- Create a wishlist for your photographer of people you want to interview, businesses you want to photograph, or landscapes you want to feature.
- You could even use a drone to get a bird's eye view of your town, especially if you have scenic landscapes or settings.

As with anything, using images and videos appropriately and purposefully is important. **Have a plan for integrating the footage you take and using it to tell the stories you want to tell!**

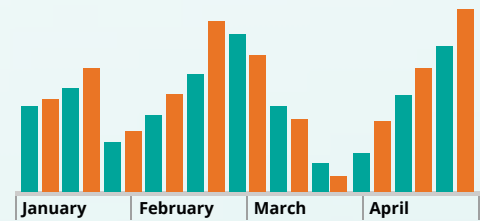
KEY #2: PROVIDE IMPORTANT INFORMATION — AND KEEP IT UPDATED!

Attention! Whether or not you are able to upgrade your entire website this month or in 18 months, you **MUST** make a point to update this key information today!

Your website needs have the key information your prospects are looking for in an easily accessible place. And it should be up to date!

Make sure your website lists the following — and keeps it updated:

- Census Data
- Unemployment Rate
- Available Property
- Workforce
- Population and Commuting Trends
- Major employers



It can be helpful to keep checklists of data that needs to be updated every year, every three years, etc. Be knowledgeable about when your information should be updated and stay on top of it!

At the minimum, you should have updated data... but *ideally*, you're also telling a story!

KEY #3: INCLUDE A CALL-TO-ACTION

Your website should have a simple Call-to-Action that invites them to leave their email addresses so that YOU can follow up with them — not wait for them to follow up with you.

In exchange for this confidential information, you need to give something in exchange. This is typically called an “opt-in gift” or a “lead magnet”.

Here are some examples of opt-in gifts:

- **Overnight Stay in a Hotel:** Each month, you could do a drawing for an overnight stay in a hotel in your community. You could partner with one or multiple local hotels for this giveaway.
- **Hotel and Restaurant Gift Packet:** Give them the chance to experience the local cuisine and spend the night in an interesting part of town.
- **Annual Drawing For a Helicopter Ride:** You could partner with a local transportation company, and do an annual drawing for a helicopter ride so they can experience the entire city. Now that’s a way to WOW a prospect!

Then, have a call to action such, like — “Enter your name and email below for a chance to win!” This should be clearly displayed on your homepage and/or sidebar.



How to Follow Up and Cultivate Your New Leads

Of course, it’s not just about collecting email addresses. It’s about following up and cultivating your new leads.

There are many ways to do this. **The 2 important rules of thumb to following up are:**

1. Follow up in ways that add value.
2. Continue following up until you close the sale or the prospect says that they’ve decided to locate in a different community. If you don’t follow up and cultivate the relationship, they’ll move on to the next community... who consistently follows up with them.

Here are some ways you can follow up:

- **Cultivate Your Entire Contact Database Through Newsletters**

Sending out a newsletter is a great way to stay top of mind with all of your contacts. You can highlight the interesting things happening in your community, as well as sharing some of your content with them.

How often should you send a newsletter? Start with sending a newsletter once a month and build from there. If you can send a newsletter as much as once a week, that's great — as long as you're providing valuable content.



- **Email Contacts Individually With Valuable Information or Opportunities**

In addition to your newsletter, sending personalized emails are important for follow-up. Here are some ways to do that:

- 1 **Share community news that would be beneficial to them.**

When your community has programs or opportunities they might be interested in, reach out and let them know! These opportunities could include:

- A new, customized training program at the local community college
- A new office building that just came on the market
- A new funding program they might qualify for
- A new business park that just had their first new tenant in place
- High-speed Internet or other infrastructure has just been extended to the business park

2 Invite them to local events in the community.

A great way for a prospect to feel a part of the community and meet other business owners or managers is to attend a local event in the community. For example, you could invite them to:

- A new office building that just came on the market
- A Chamber of Commerce business event
- An intimate dinner with a group of people they might like to meet
- An annual banquet like a business awards program

NOTE: This can obviously be sensitive (or not possible) if the prospect requires confidentiality and isn't ready to network with other business owners. Make sure to keep any needs for confidentiality in mind before inviting prospects to local events.

3 Add a thoughtful, personal touch.

Behind every email address is a person... Get to know who that person is, and then find ways to relate to them.



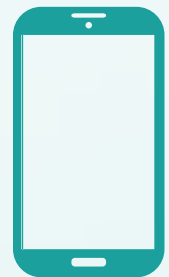
You could look them up on LinkedIn or google them and see if you have any common ground. You could send them a handwritten personal note and a gift from the community, like a jar of homemade jelly from your local farmer's market.

This will help you to stand out to them and create a more meaningful connection!

KEY #4: MAKE SURE YOUR WEBSITE INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING FRONT-END TECHNICAL PRIORITIES

Your website needs to:

- **Load quickly**, so that users have a positive experience from the moment they arrive at your website. (No one likes waiting for pages to load. A slow website could lead to losing website visitors.)
- **Have a specific URL separate from the county government website.** Your website should NOT just be a part of the dropdown menu on the county or city page. If your organization isn't a big enough priority for having its own website, why should your organization be a priority to potential prospects?
- **Make it easy for people to contact you.** Make it clear and easy for people to send you an email inquiry.
- **Be mobile-friendly.** Many people are surfing the web on their smartphones. Make sure that your website will show up on people's devices! (If this change has to wait on a website redesign, just do what you can now with the other updates.) :-)



KEY #5: MAKE SURE YOUR WEBSITE INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING BACK-END TECHNICAL PRIORITIES

Behind the scenes, you need to set up Google Analytics, so you can review who visits your site, where they spend time, and when/where they leave. This allows you to better cater your content to your target market.



You'll be able to review search terms people google in order to find you, so you can start to think like your target audience and write topics they want to read about, know about, and search for.

You can incorporate important SEO keywords into all of your content as well as the back-end so that your organization shows up higher in search results.



Justifying Website Upgrades to Stakeholders

Your stakeholders know that a website is important, but do they truly know HOW important it is?

Here are 3 key points that can demonstrate the value of your website upgrade to stakeholders:

- **Most of your leads are (or should) be coming from your website.** If you have an outdated or inefficient website, you may be losing new leads every single day. Meanwhile, by making key adjustments, you could be collecting the names and emails of potential leads and prospects — that eventually could become more business investments and revenue for your community.
- **A great website can give you a major leg-up amongst the competition and show the amazing value your community has to offer.** Many EDO websites across the country still are less-than-stellar. By making your website a priority, you'll be ahead of the curve — for now! (The Internet is going nowhere soon, so get your organization to shine online now instead of being behind the curve in the future!)

- **All of your social media efforts (that are 'free') should be driving traffic to your website.** Spending a lot of time creating a presence on social media? That's great... But unless you're getting your audience to ultimately go to your website, contact you or leave their email with you — your social media efforts will not garner you the results you want. You've got to drive them to your website and THEN, your website needs to wow them!

The last thing you want is to spend time and money on advertising, promoting and doing marketing outreach to drive your target market to your website — only to then not be able to convert them to customers!

If you can't get your stakeholders on board with major updates, review the tips in this guide and make the changes you can now.



HERE'S YOUR NEXT STEP:

Review this list and start making the adjustments you can today. You might even discover you don't need an entire website redesign to increase the effectiveness of your website — although that's a great goal to move towards in the future.

Looking to redesign your website, make key upgrades, or even justify an increase in the budget to stakeholders? PPR Strategies can help you with that! Reach out to Sandy@PPRStrategies.com for a complimentary 15-minute consultation.



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