

10

ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF AN ASSOCIATION WEBSITE

Are you able to quickly and cost effectively communicate with your members?

Can members self serve at their own convenience?

Is your website a cost centre or a profit centre?

Is your website significantly reducing operational costs?

The Why and How guide to successful Association Websites

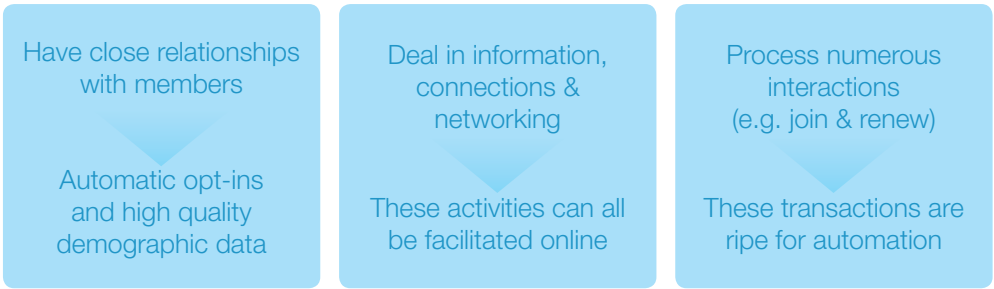


Helping Australian membership organisations get closer to their members.



10 Essential Features of an Association's Website

Associations and organisations with members have a unique opportunity to find value in the internet. For example, they:



To make the most of the internet for your organisation consider the following website features.

1. Content Management System (CMS)

What is it?

Content management (CMS) is an entry level feature that allows you to update your website content via an interface that looks very like Microsoft Word. It enables 'non-technical' users to take back control of their website.

Why & how?

Keep your website alive and current, let your members and other visitors know that the web is an important contact and interaction channel. If possible put together a simple six month communication plan for your website to follow, and intersperse this with relevant current affairs.

2. Email Broadcast Tools

What is it?

Good e-mail broadcast tools allow 'non-technical' team members to execute personalised, graphically rich, targeted (segmented), measurable and highly cost effective bulk communications to members and contacts over the web.

Why & how?

Don't sit back and wait for members to visit your website, especially if they are not familiar with it or are uncomfortable with the web. General communications should be kept relevant and targeted. Email communications can help drive event participation and membership renewals.

3. Database Segmentation & Targeting

What is it?

Good databases allow you to select a group of people using the data you hold on them, e.g. by postcode or area of interest. Web based (integrated) databases allow you to take actions, for example broadcast emailing or VIP logins.

Why & how?

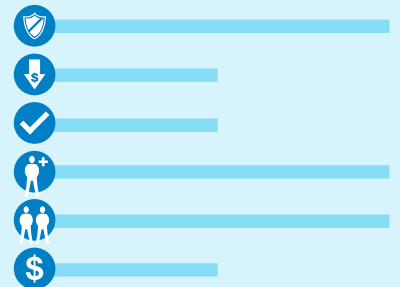
When it is not practical to contact each member individually, segmentation keeps communications and interactions relevant, engaging and fair. For example members are commonly given access to events with favourable pricing.

ORGANISATIONAL BENEFITS

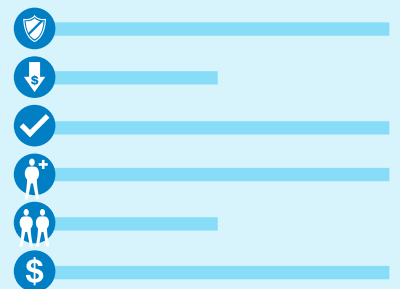
- BRANDING & AWARENESS
- COST REDUCTION
- SERVICE IMPROVEMENT
- MEMBER ACQUISITION
- MEMBER RETENTION
- DRIVE REVENUES

IMPACT

LOW HIGH



LOW HIGH



LOW HIGH





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4. Online Payments

What is it?

Taking online payments requires a 'payment gateway' to facilitate the automated and secure transfer of money between accounts. These gateways integrate with order processing functions, to maximise automation.

Why & how?

Online payment systems facilitate purchases and allow your members (and visitors) to transact with you online at any time in a quick, easy, worry free way. Provide clear instruction on the buying process and make getting started obvious and straightforward!

5. Automate Transactions & Invoicing

What is it?

Good online systems contain an orders area for reviewing and processing transactions. They can also automatically generate invoices and export details of financial transactions into Excel or book keeping software.

Why & how?

Associations and clubs tend to process a large number of lower value transactions; manual effort can be minimised via automation. Remember, the moment of purchase is the time that members are most likely to take up an additional offer (known as cross sell).

6. Online Join, Renew, Subscribe & Contact Us

What is it?

These are some of the online forms that allow your members and visitors to interact with you directly. Forms capture the enquiry and email it to you; they can also add members and contacts into your database and 'opt them in'.

Why & how?

These are good features for building relationships, databases and increasing member numbers. When prospects join, make it easy for them and minimise data duplication by auto completing forms from your database where possible.

7. Facilitate & Encourage Community Conversations

What is it?

Peer to peer communication via features such as forums, blogs and comments can be added into websites or linked using cost effective online tools. Often moderation is a required feature.

Why & how?

Membership organisations are well placed to take advantage of the rapid rise of online networking. Interactions either between members, or you and your members are cost effective relationship building and can create a buzz that drives new membership and events bookings.

IMPACT

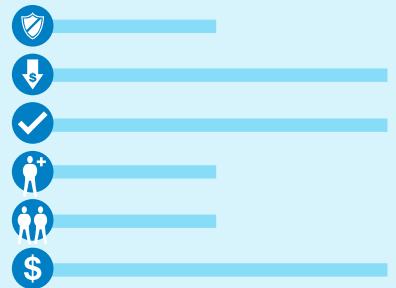
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10 Essential Features of an Association's Website

8. Event Bookings & Management

What is it?

This feature allows visitors to make bookings (and payments) for events. Some systems can also handle table allocations, registration card production and tie into continued professional development points tracking.

Why & how?

These features help you and your members. The upside for you is a significant reduction in manual processing, whilst members can book at their own convenience. This ease of booking can also lead to improved attendance.

9. Fully Integrate Your Membership Databases

What is it?

Online databases which work in concert with website features facilitating all common membership and contact interactions. When working well it appears as though the website knows each member personally.

Why & how?

The impact of a fully integrated Membership database cannot be overstated. It allows for updating own details, members logins, differential pricing, self serve CPD details and invoicing, the list goes on and on.

10. Analytics & Tracking

What is it?

Website reporting ranges from statistics on popular pages, to where people arrive from and which pages they leave from. Bounce rates are particularly useful statistics. Reports should be graphical and interactive so that they are easy to understand and use.

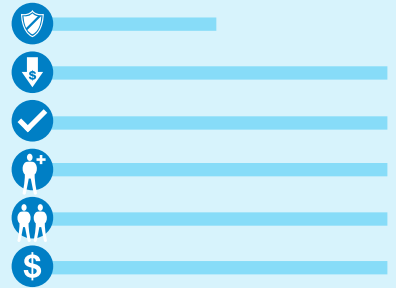
Why & how?

Understanding how your website is being used by visitors (along with qualitative member feedback) is essential in its continued refinement. Statistics allow testing of content and functionality to categorically measure what works best for you and your members.

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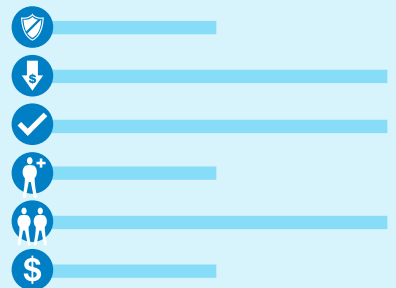
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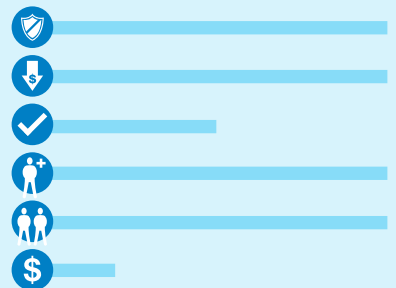
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About Member Manager

Member Manager is the state-of-the-art online solution for medium sized Associations, Clubs and Membership groups. Crucially it integrates a central Member and Contact database with key features that allow members and other visitors to self serve via your website. This includes membership join and renew, events bookings, email broadcasting, website content management and much more.



About The Author: Luke Farley

Luke is a founding director at L^{CUBED} (implementers of the Member Manager solution). He has been in the technical marketing field for over 10 years, lectures for the Australian Direct Marketing Association and has been published in Australia's Marketing Magazine and SmartCompany. Luke and the team at L^{CUBED} adopt a Thirdway Web (www.thirdwayweb.com) approach to their Web projects, helping us deliver more for less.

