

Making Your School's Website Work for You

Blackbaud Tip Sheet | by *Bill McGibony*



Your website is a reflection of the culture and quality of your school. It should represent your unique image and the experience you provide to the families that are a part of your school community. By enabling your school's website to be an interactive communication tool, you are empowering and encouraging more participation and support and ultimately deepening your relationships with each member of your school community.

Here are some basic tips for making the most of your school's website:

- **Segment your audience.** You already know the obvious segments of your audience (students, parents, teachers, alumni, etc.), and you should make sure to tailor your website content to each group. You should also consider segmenting your audiences by their interests, grade levels, or activities to more effectively engage them.
- **Launch marketing efforts.** Generate excitement about your online community through multiple marketing channels including traditional methods such as email and direct mail, as well as new media such as Facebook®, Twitter®, and RSS. Doing so will help the school connect with harder-to-reach audiences, such as alumni.
- **Educate your audience.** Don't assume your users know how to use an interactive website or where to find it. You should print your web address on all external mailings with instructions on how to log into the online community (or how to sign up).
- **Analyze your web traffic.** Knowing where your audience is spending time on your site allows you to communicate with them effectively. Analytics tools can help collect this information, which can then be used to reorganize your site architecture or determine how to best promote certain pages.
- **Solicit feedback.** Don't assume you know what your constituents want. Use polls, surveys, and preferences to really understand how to interact with everyone in your school community. Provide them with specific options for giving feedback.
- **Encourage participation.** Give users the ability to post content to your site. Interactive tools such as class notes, message boards, blogs, or polls encourage others to participate and visit the site more frequently.
- **Stimulate the senses.** Use multimedia to enhance your site and make it visually appealing – videos, photos, and podcasts are great at capturing the interest of site visitors while promoting the school's unique mission.
- **Keep content fresh.** A stale site results in fewer return visitors. Keep it simple and up to date with new content daily to encourage repeat visits and increased participation. Encourage the participation of various faculty and staff members if necessary.
- **Monitor search engine results.** Help alumni and prospective students find your site by adhering to search engine optimization best practices. For example, use relevant keywords and tag images appropriately.

Catering to a diverse audience that includes anyone from busy parents to inquisitive prospective students is a challenge for any school. However, knowing your audiences and their needs will allow you to maintain an effective website that does not feel overwhelming. That way, your website can serve as the marketing and communications tool that your users have come to expect.



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