

[Andrew Palmer](#) - Fri, 1/23/2015 - 00:00

We are becoming an increasingly visual culture. Consider this: of all the photos ever taken by humankind, 10% have been taken in the last 12 months (Source: Adage). In the age of Instagram and Snapchat, images are central to how we communicate with and relate to each other on a daily basis.

Our fondness for images should come as no surprise. 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and visuals are processed 60,000 times faster in the brain than text. (Sources: 3M Corporation and Zabisco). Accordingly, image-rich content has always performed well online. Google introduced images into its search results over eight years ago, and found that 60% of consumers are more likely to click on a business whose images appear in search results.

So what does all that mean for your charity? Look at these 2 men:

Friendly Guy Angry Guy

Who would you rather sit next to on an airplane? Or ask advice from?

Although we don't know anything about them, we make an assessment based on their looks -- good or bad, right or wrong, it's inevitable. And the same thing happens every day on your website.

All that considered, here are some principles to keep in mind when designing your site

Establish Your Organization's Credibility

As with any important decision, prospects will give making a planned gift careful thought and research. That research will likely involve a visit to your website, so be sure you make a good impression. 46.1% of people say a website's design is the number one criterion for determining the credibility of the company. (Source: Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab). In our philanthropic world, a prospect won't give to an organization he can't trust.

Credibility in design can be difficult to qualify. Generally, a professional looking website looks "clean" with plenty of white space between links and body copy. Otherwise, one sure-fire way to hurt your organization's credibility is to publish out-

of-date content. Nothing says "out of business" or "run away" like a stale, abandoned looking website. Culprits can be events with dates in the past, "news" articles that are years old, or a blog that hasn't been updated in the past 6 months, and worst of all, pages with broken links.

Our own website focus group testing confirms that first impressions about websites can mean more than the copy. Seventy-five percent of our subjects cited design-related reasons for rejecting and/or mistrusting a website.

Engage Your Donor Prospects

Use visuals to capture interest and inspire visitors to make a gift to your organization. Quite simply, text accompanied by images is more interesting than text alone. We're "visually wired" - almost 50% of our brain is involved in visual processing. And it's no wonder that images come as a relief from the gigabytes of the written word we consume every day.

Images can underscore certain points about your mission. Feature photos of the people your organization serves. Similarly, donor stories come alive when accompanied by a picture or video. Give visual media priority in your web design; don't just stick it in as an afterthought.

Caltech Website

Caltech gives the visual priority in their website design. Each page on their planned giving site features a bold image at the top. The friendly photos of legacy society members below invite users to click to learn more.

Educate Your Prospects About the Type of Gifts

Many planned giving concepts are complex. So, presenting this information in an easy to understand manner may be one of the most challenging aspects of designing your website.

A visual can help serve this end. You can employ infographics, which combine images with a minimal amount of text, to explain complex topics, like gift annuity payout rates or charitable lead trust structures. On top of educating site visitors, you'll increase your web traffic. Publishers who use infographics see a 12% increase in web traffic. (Source AnsonAlex)

The visuals can also nudge a prospective donor to make a decision. Landing pages with videos receive 86% more conversions and interactive content generates twice

as many conversions (Source Content Benchmarking Study). Nonprofits can capitalize on this trend with online gift calculators. These interactive tools allow a prospect to enter personal information, such as age and income, in order to view gift calculations, personalized for them. Below is an illustration from our gift calculator, [GiftCalcs](#).

GiftCalcs

Example of Personalized Gift Calculation for a Charitable Gift Annuity. The diagram above integrates visuals with personalized calculations to give the visitor a clear understanding of the tax and payment benefits of the gift, as well as the basics of how a gift annuity works.

Design for Your Audience

As you know, the typical planned gift donor may be in her 70s or 80s, so she's probably not the most savvy when it comes to the World Wide Web. Don't make it any harder than it needs to be for her to find the information she's looking for. Create a simple information architecture that's easy to navigate. Make sure the links are all the same style so they're easy to distinguish from the body text. Put important information above the fold (the portion of a webpage that is visible without scrolling). And in case, despite your best intentions, a visitor can't find the information she is after, include a site map that includes a list of links to all your site pages.

Finally, since your audience is older, their vision probably isn't 20-20. Avoid putting text in very light or bright colors that may be hard to read. Make sure you use text on the larger side to start with, and add buttons that allow users to enlarge the text ever further, for easier reading.

A visually appealing website is no longer just a frill – it's what your planned gift prospects expect. Make sure you keep your site relevant in 2015 by applying these principles. Even if you can't afford a total redesign in the near future, just adding a single picture or video to a webpage will make it more engaging and sharable.

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