

## What websites can do

### Is your website working for you?

"My website isn't working" - a cry heard all too often. But when you ask what it was supposed to do, blank stares all round...

One secret of success is to be clear about what your website will do for your community - write it down, see if it is sensible and ask yourself how each bit of the site (or proposal) will help.

#### **There are three main things websites can deliver:**

- Increased exposure (either direct or as part of the wider net);
- Reduced costs of getting information out to your community and
- Better customer relations (which leads eventually to both the above).

**Exposure:** Most people think that sites are about exposure - this is actually quite tricky to do well and needs careful thought about who the target audience is, what language they use, how they think – and much more.

**Costs:** Reducing costs is easier - think how you can show community members how to help themselves and in the process do some of your work for you. The Dell corporation used to employ thousands of people to take telephone orders for their PC's - now it is all done on-line. Can you do something similar?

**Customer relationships:** The most valuable way to use a website is usually, to build community relationships. It costs ten times more to expose your self or product to a new person than to an existing one – this media source is thus an opportunity for you to find out more about your community, what they like and what you could do better for them. Make them feel and look important – people will find empowered through knowledge and consistency as this will stream line their needs and thought poses, making your job easier.

## Where to get a website

### Be clear about your website needs

There is no definitive answer to the age old question of "does this suit me?"  
The best solution to your website needs depends on what you want the website for - and how much value will it bring.

So start by being clear about what you want the website to do - in information sharing and education - what you are prepared to pay to get the economical benefits you expect. It is a good idea to make sure you measure what you currently get before you do any website work - you can see then whether things get better the way you hope. Whether you are going to "do-it-yourself" or get a website designer involved, it pays to have a clear brief:

- Define the communities objective and show how it will fit in with the rest of your communities strategy;
- Write down who the site/pages are aimed at (what are they like? their interests? what information do they require?)
- What message are you giving them (and why is it interesting to them - rather than to you)?
- What do you want them to DO - this last point is very important - make sure they can do what you want them to do.

**DIY versions** cost from about \$100 a year upwards a year.

**Involving a designer** costs more - from \$500 upwards, the sky is the limit. But my advice is to keep it as simple as possible - don't try and be clever just because you can - be clear about what you are doing and why.

Search engines can't see "Flash" very well - unless you are appealing to young people, stick to simple, clean images and text - people appreciate it!

## Effective websites

### Think like a punter

Are the words you use on your website the words that your customers use? This is very important! Not only will you strike a rapport with your site visitors, but anyone using a search engine to find information like yours.

Before you even start thinking about the contents of a site, ask yourself three questions:

1. Who am I talking to?
2. What do I want to tell them?
3. What do I want them to do?

Write the answers large on a piece of paper, stick it up on the wall where you can see it and keep referring back to it. Keep checking that what you are intending to do fits in with these answers. Use the language appropriate for reaching out to your audience, are you talking about their needs rather than how clever you are and can they do whatever it is you want them to do wherever they are on the site?

Being community focused isn't easy, the most interesting person in the world is always "you" but you can't run a quick check on the number of times you use "we" or "I" and the number of times you use "you". Ideally, three to one in favor of the community.

**Keep your site up-to-date:** To be most effective, a website needs to be refreshed often, giving up-to-date information (and removing old content) - so don't throw away the reminder about what you are actually trying to achieve!

## Web Counters

### Would you like to know?

These counter are free for the most part but a with things that are “FREE” sometimes they come with thinks like linking advertising date a (pop- ups) to your site. There are good “FREE” counters out there but just note that nothing is “FREE”. These counters can give you the following information on your website;

- Which sites or search engines send to your site more visitors?
- How often are your pages reloaded?
- How many hits have your sites every hour, day, week, month, and year?
- What operating system and web browsers do your visitors use?
- Which IP address your web page visitors come from?

But before you add a cheesy counter to your site see if your service provider can not supply you with the same information. Most servers providers can, so then it just becomes a matter of what you want your site to look like and if you want visitors to see how many people have viewed your site.

We are recommending that communities who have website start tracking the action on their site. This is part of the next generation of NPDES permits, where the Ohio EPA wants to see actual numbers of people attending education sessions/workshop and been targeted with materials and information. There for the only why you can achieve this is by tracking or counting your visitors.

**What to Track:** Lastly the question can be asked what do you track? In general your service provider or web counter host will be tracking the following information; Page Loads, First Time Visitors, Unique Visitors, and Returning Visitors. But again as we have said before it is all in what you end goal is with your website and who your audience is that will determine your actions and design.

## **Resources**

### **Do's and Don'ts on designing your site**

<http://www.spiderpro.com/pr/prstgm001.html>

### **Web counters**

<http://www.statcounter.com/>

### **Good example of an NPDES stormwater laid out site**

City of Solon <http://www.solonohio.org/PublicWorks/engineeringEPA.html>

## **Contact**

Meiring Borchers from Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc. for more information on planning, creating and publishing your NPDES Stormwater web site at [jmb@crwp.org](mailto:jmb@crwp.org) or 440.975.3870.