

Trustee Tip October 2017

Building the Library's Online Branch

Libraries often consider how to create welcoming entrances for patrons visiting the building for the first time. The same care should be taken with the library website, as this online “branch” will often be where new patrons first visit the library. If the library's website looks outdated or lacks important information, these patrons may dismiss what the library has to offer.

Creating a welcoming, attractive library website does more, however, than just encourage patrons to find and use the library's resources. High-quality website design also affects your patrons' likelihood of finding the website. Search engines use algorithms to determine the order in which results are displayed, and websites are evaluated on a number of factors, including structure, security, and accessibility. Poor design may make your library's site's search ranking suffer, and in turn make your library difficult for users to find.

Key content for your website

Visitors to your library's website expect to find key content in logical places. Your library's street address, phone number, and hours should appear in a prominent place on the homepage. Important site features such as the online catalog, databases, events calendar, list of services, library policies, and social media accounts should be easily located on the menu or the homepage. Users should also be able to find the library director's name, the current library board membership, and board meeting times & location.

Accessibility is better for everyone

Users with a wide range of needs and abilities will visit your library's website. Designing with accessibility in mind will result in a website that's more useful for everyone who visits. Considerations may include:

- People with visual impairments who may benefit from a larger default font size or alternate image descriptions for use with a screen reader
- People with hearing impairments who may benefit from transcriptions or closed captioning for audio or video content
- People with reading disabilities or intellectual disabilities who may benefit from content written in short, simple sentences for a broad audience.

Design with the mobile experience in mind

Having a mobile-friendly website is critical in helping patrons to find and use your library's website effectively. A 2016 study from the Pew Research Center showed that 12% of American adults were smartphone-only, meaning they used only a smartphone to go online and did not have broadband internet at home. That figure jumps to 20% for households earning below \$30,000. This number will likely grow in the future.

Libraries websites can employ responsive web design to improve the experience of smartphone users. Websites created with responsive design concepts can detect the type of device or browser being used and optimize the layout based on screen size and device capabilities. As a result, mobile users can more easily read and navigate sites thanks to enlarged text, resized images, and menus near the top of the page.

Free web hosting for Kentucky public libraries

If your website needs an update, you may want to explore web services offered by the Kentucky Library Association (KLA). The KLA Information & Technology Round Table (ITRT) offers free web hosting for Kentucky libraries. Libraries must pay for domain name registration, but otherwise they can set up a free website with popular content management software including WordPress, Drupal, and Joomla. Libraries can request a test site to try out different options. They can also move websites created with other development tools to ITRT's hosting service. For more information, visit: <http://www.kla-itrt.org/services/>.