

Nonprofit 911 – September 29, 2009
Digital Facelift:
Tips for Taking Your Website from
Blah "Before" to Amazing "After"
with Margaux O'Malley
Sponsored by Network for Good

The MP3 audio transcript can be found at
www.fundraising123.org or www.nonprofit911.org

Rebecca Higman: So now, I am happy to introduce our speaker: Margaux O'Malley is one of the cofounders of Grand Junction Design. She is responsible for overseeing client projects as well as procuring new work for the company. Margaux graduated from Carleton College with a BA in Latin American Studies and Spanish. A year teaching and a year working in the for profit sector made it very clear to Margaux that she wanted to do something toward making the world a better place and championing progressive causes like affordable housing, human rights, and saving the environment.

Ten years ago she took a job with Neighborhood Funders Group and started down that path. Since then she has really worked with a variety of groups to further these causes. Margaux personally focus is on environmental sustainability. She enjoys spending as much time as possible outdoors. In her family and at Grand Junction Design, she makes every effort to consider the environmental impact of each action and decision and to teach her children to do the same. We all appreciate being green around here.

So without further ado, I am happy to turn the floor over to Margaux to get us started.

Margaux O'Malley: Thanks Rebecca. Hi everybody. Thank you so much for having me today. I am very excited to be able to share the story of a very, very successful nonprofit website transformation. And I hope that parts and pieces of it will help you transform your own websites, too.

You have all seen the situation where the organization grows and needs change over time. And as technology changes, peoples' expectations about what website should do and what a website should include change too, which sometimes leaves us feeling like we have to change along with it.

So the Hunger project found themselves in that situation. You can see in the slides that Rebecca sent you a screenshot of the way that their website used to look when we first met them. It is not bad, it just doesn't do a really great job of featuring them. They had grown so much, and their work had really evolved so much, that it just wasn't clear what a fantastic job they were doing.

And so we worked with them to try to highlight that a little bit better. You can see on the next slide where their website was this spring, which is much more organized and does a better job managing their content.

I don't know if you are at a computer right now and you want to look at how their website looks now. You can go to thp.org. And then you can see that it is even yet in another more evolved phase right now, on thp.org again.

We got there through a lot of planning. I am a believer in measuring twice and cutting twice. I think in the end it is much better. And obviously we can't predict everything that is going to happen or everything we are going to need, but we try to do the best that we can.

So we start with the question of, "What is your goal?" Who are you trying to talk to? What do you want them to do when they get to your website? What are you trying to tell people about your organization?

If you can, it is good to also think about the future directions that you might want to take, even if they aren't happening right now. So for The Hunger Project, they had a lot of really nice statistics and measurable outcomes, and things like that, that they felt were particularly important to feature. So that was part of the consideration, as well as just a general positive attitude, rather than one of, "Oh my gosh! This problem is so horrible! We need your money to help solve it." Rather than approaching things that way, they had a very positive approach of, "Look at all that we are doing to help this situation. Don't you want to get on board with us?" which is of course a subtle difference, but it was really important to them in the way that they presented themselves and all their materials, so we wanted to be sure to be consistent with that, with the website as well.

And really, they wanted to get people involved both as volunteers and as donors, which I know is true of probably everybody on this call. Looking forward to the future for them as well, they knew at the time that they wanted to have carousel on their homepage, which you see that they do now. And they wanted a blog, which they are actually working on right now. It is not public yet. And then down the line after that, that they wanted to be integrating their CRM, their Constituent Relationship Management, with that.

And so that is, in the future, going to enable them to do things like have people register for events online. People can already make donations online, but it doesn't yet automatically go into their database. But it will in the future. So things like that, and those were all things that when we planned this, we knew that they would want to be viewing. And so we were able to build the foundation for that from the get go rather than having to try to tack something onto it reactively later on.

And obviously, you can't predict everything that is going to happen. But to the extent that you are aware of anything like that, it is good to consider it in the choices that you make today, even though you may not be doing that until tomorrow.

So another thing that we looked at in their case was stepping outside and trying to get the outside perspective of their organization and what would speak to the people on the

outside of the organization. And I think that is often really difficult for those of us who are day to day steeped in the works that we are doing.

Whether you are working with animals, or you are working with children, or with the environment, or whatever it is, you are doing that because you love it and that is your passion. And sometimes it is easy for us to forget that not everybody necessarily shares that priority that we set at the highest priority, or that not everybody necessarily has the vocabulary that you do about it, or that not everybody really cares who is on your board of directors as much as they care what changes you are actually making or how their money is going to be spent if they give it to you.

So it is important and helpful to step outside and look at what the priorities of the general public or whoever you are talking to might be, rather than from the inside out presenting yourself.

And this can be really helpful to...A lot of times, personally, just I and my team, end up providing that voice for our clients, because we are on the outside of what we are doing. But even if you are working internally on making little changes on your own website, you can ask friends and family or even people who are a step further than that removed away from you to talk to them about it and get that perspective from someone who doesn't deal with this everyday. And that input can be incredibly valuable when you are thinking and planning how you want to approach your website.

Once you realize what is going to be important to the outside world, that really helps you to be able to present it in a way that is going to be reachable for them, or that is going to be understandable and will speak to them.

So the content of the website is, I would say, probably the most common way that I have seen organizations outgrow their website. And I would guess that a lot of you are finding yourself in this situation. You start out with a website that has got 10 pages on it because you have listed your staff, and you have listed your mission, and you have listed a couple of your programs, and your contact information. And when you built the site five years ago that was all you needed. But now maybe you have got a blog somewhere else on Blogger or something like that that is external, or you have got more programs now and you want to be featuring those, or you are actually writing press releases and news updates, and things like that. But your website wasn't built with that in mind, and so it has all gotten tacked on as an afterthought. And that is a super, super common situation, and that is exactly where The Hunger Project was.

So one very major aspect of their website transformation was to take all of that and to just sort it out into different buckets. I guess the analogy that I would think of is cleaning out my closet. So I am going to take everything out of my closet and put it in a big pile in the floor, and I am going to sort it out. Do I want this or can I donate it to a charity? Sorry. That is a confusing example! Do I want this or do I want to get rid of it?

And so some of it you throw out; just completely throw it out of the room. You are not going to use it at all. Some of it, “Well here is a pair of jeans. They are good but they have got a hole in the knee, so I will patch them.” Or, in a parallel concept, “I will edit the content of this page. It is pretty good, but I am just going to rewrite it or tweak it a little bit.” Or, “This I definitely have to have.”

So you know what you are keeping, you know what you are keeping with changes, and you know what you are getting rid of. And then, of the stuff that you are keeping and keeping with changes, you sort it out into the different buckets.

Maybe you have a whole section of press releases now that you didn’t have before. And maybe some of the press releases pertain to program A, and some of them pertain to program B, and some of them pertain to internal operations. So you may want to organize them not only in a bucket of press releases, but in some sub-buckets beyond that too. So if you just picture yourself with all these clothes around you on the floor and you just sort them out, that is pretty much what you want to do with your content.

And something that many of you may know, Mark Rovner, who is with Sea Change Strategies and has done Nonprofit 911 calls before, and is just in general a fantastic website and communications person.

We had this conversation the other day about how content is probably the single most important aspect of a website. And the great thing about it is that it is something that is pretty simple that most of us have within our power to do and to do well.

So if you do a good job of organizing your content and you have good and relevant content on there, that is going to be your single best asset of your website for a lot of reasons. First of all, it helps so much with search engines. The more content that you have that matches the words people are looking for, the more it matches page titles, the more it matches words in the URL, those are all things that are going to bump you up higher on the search engine results when you match what someone is looking for.

Also, having content that is up to date on your website gives you credibility and makes you look like you are active and real and knowledgeable, and that if people give money to you, you are going to be doing something good with it.

So content is king. I have heard that phrase used a lot and it really is true. The good thing is it is the simplest things that we can do.

And just a side note. Writing for web is really, really not like writing for print. I am not going to try to go into this in detail right now, but I just want to note it. And there are a lot of resources available on the web about it, and I am sure that some of them are even available through Network for Good and through Nonprofit 911.org.

But I would just say that there is an aspect of it that really should be paid attention to, like the words that you choose for your keyword searches and search engine optimization. But

also, just having things be very, very succinct, because people just don't want to read a whole lot on the screen. Anyways, there are more resources on that, so I would certainly recommend checking them out before you put a lot of energy into writing anything.

In The Hunger Project's case, this is basically what we did. Looking at the next slide where I talked about them, I am thinking that I think I said all these things already. Oh, in their particular case, one of the big aspects that was missing from their old website had to do with all the different buckets that we had sorted things into. So they had publications, and videos, and news, and they also had a lot of different program countries where they work. I think there are 13. And then they also had different areas of their programs' focus.

And it was pretty complicated in their situation. There was a lot of overlap. So they might have one program like on women's rights or something that would be operating in several different countries. Then they had a different program, I think on HIV, that was operating in different other countries, multiple countries.

We ended up really taking advantage of the categories that Drupal provide. By the way, Drupal is an open source content management system that we ended up using for their website. So we took advantage of its categorization ability to categorize this content.

So essentially, as I depicted on the next one, you can get to...Most anything on their site can be gotten to through a number of different channels. So basically, if I know that I am interested in India, for example, I can just go under "Where we work" and then click India and it will take me to all the stuff on India, whether it be news, or a video, or a publication, or what have you. If I know I just want to see what news has been released lately from The Hunger Project, I can just go to the news section and I might see something on India and then something on Peru and then something on Mexico. And the same thing can also be done if I know that I am interested particularly in HIV-AIDS or any other topic.

This is a really huge asset for them in terms of helping people find what it is that they are interested in. If I go to the website and I go, "Gosh. I don't really know what The Hunger Project does, but my friend told me that they were a neat organization, and I was thinking about giving them a donation," well you all know, because Rebecca told you, that I have a great fondness for Latin America. So what am I going to do when I go to that website? I am going to go to "Where we work" and I am going to see Latin America, and then I am going to say, "Oh awesome. There are three countries in Latin America where The Hunger Project works." And I am going to go check all those out. And because I see that they do great work in Latin America, I am going to give them a donation.

Rebecca may not have the same approach. Maybe Rebecca is just really interested in HIV-AIDS. She is going to do the same thing. She is going to go by topic. But what this says is basically present the information in the way that I, the user, and ideally the donor, want it. And it doesn't make your life any more difficult, because we are using an awesome content management system.

And Drupal is a fantastic system. But there are plenty of other content management systems, too, that can be configured in this way. You can even do it without a content management system. It is just more cumbersome.

So in my next slide I have their navigation, which is basically how their menu breaks down. And this was part of our planning process. This is part of what bucket is under what bucket, and where things are cross listed and things like that, which is basically just another part of the consideration for how you would want to organize the content.

The visual aspect of it from the design perspective is, I think, where people tend to want to start when they are thinking about doing a new website. But I actually think it is not where you want to start. I actually think that is probably one of the last things that you want to think about. Not that you shouldn't think about it all at first, but that you shouldn't go too far down that road until you have got some of the other stuff sorted out. Because while the design is really, of course, key for determining how people feel and how people initially react emotionally to your website, obviously it is important for that, but another really big function that it has that people may or may not even be aware of is leading your eye around the page and leading toward the things that the website designer or the organization wants you to see.

And so once you know what information you have on the site and how you are going to try to organize it, and what your priorities are, how you are reaching people, that is when you take all that and you say, "OK. How are we going to design this? How are we going to present this so that we lead peoples' eye around the page? We know that we want them to see this first and we want this to be the most prominent." But you can't have too many things that are too prominent or they get overwhelmed. So balance things like that.

In the Hunger Project's case, you remember I said earlier that they were very key on presenting a positive focus, not gloom and doom, and that they really wanted to get people involved.

So to speak to the positive focus, they used a lot of bright and uplifting colors. In the human element, they had all these fantastic photos. They were really lucky that they had such a great inventory of photos of their own that they could use. They have a lot of close-ups of people's faces. And for the most part they are happy. So that gives me, as the user, a really positive feeling when I look at the website. It gives me the sense that my involvement with this organization is actually going to touch peoples' lives, which is what I think people are looking for by and large when they are making a donation or deciding to support an organization. And so this human connection was really important for them.

And as you can see, too, part of what they wanted to do when they got people involved was to donate or to volunteer. And so they highlighted those actions by some bright colors; the green "stay up to date" up in the header, and then the orange "Give now and give monthly" buttons for the donations. So they are nice and bright and they are

prominent, but they are not obnoxious. They are not flashing. They are not moving across the screen. They are not offensive.

The other thing is, too, is that as you navigate around this site, the “Give now” and the “Stay up to date” buttons stay in the same place throughout the whole site. And this is actually really important, because part of the psychology behind getting somebody to donate is to make it easy, so that when they are moved to do it, they don’t have to think about it too much. They can just do it.

And so if you have your donation button in the same place throughout the site, then as they move around the site they can always get there. And they know, even if they haven’t actively consciously thought, “Oh, there is the donate button. I will remember that for whenever I decide to pull out my wallet,” they know it is there. And so when the spirit moves them they don’t have to look for it. It is just there and it works. And they can just put in their credit card and they just made you a donation. Same thing with the email newsletter, although that doesn’t have as much of a direct financial impact.

So to sum up, basically you want to start with identifying your goals, making a plan, stepping outside and remembering that it is not you you are talking to. It is other people on the outside.

Identifying and organizing your content, working on the design to highlight that, and then making your calls to action, whatever it is that you actually want people to do, donate, or sign up for the newsletter, or what have you, making those prominent and easy for people to find.

And on my last slide, just for fun, I put in the credits, which thanks the various people who contributed so much to the success of the project. I also need to just say that Jenna Recuber on the Hunger Project Staff was absolutely fantastic in terms of her commitment to it and her, I guess, ability to think through this and willingness to devote a lot of time. And that is going to be key for organizations who are looking to do a big website project. A very key part is going to be having a dedicated staff person. And they don’t have to be technical. They don’t have to have a background in it. They just need to be dedicated. And she certainly deserves a huge amount of credit for the success of this website, so they are lucky to have her.

If it is OK with everybody, Rebecca, I wanted to go ahead and just, on this topic, realize that the ideal scenario is kind of the one that I have presented. You know, the one where you have a totally dedicated staff person who is going to be able to give a fantastic effort to a project like this, and that you have funds to do a complete overhaul of your website.

And obviously some people find themselves in that situation, but probably not the majority of us nonprofits. And so what I wanted to do was take a little bit of, I guess, a mini approach to that. We picked three organizations which Rebecca mentioned earlier, and we took a look at their websites and came up with some tips that should be relatively

quick and relatively inexpensive to implement that might get a lot of mileage without having to do a whole website redesign.

And so Election Defense Alliance was the first one we looked at, which I don't know if you can actually click the link from your slide. But if not, it is electiondefensealliance.org, which is actually a Drupal website. Yay!

I felt like my reaction was it has got a lot of fantastic information. So I think that in a lot of ways you are very much in the same position as The Hunger Project was where there is just so much of it and it is all really good stuff. But I think that stepping back and saying, "OK. What is the most important thing here? What do I really want people to see?" is going to get you a long way here, because there is just a lot competing for my attention right here at this point.

So I think the thing is, "What is the most important thing that you want me to do?" And then play that up and play the other stuff down a little bit, which could be done just by adjusting font size a little bit. In your Drupal website, somebody who can get into the code can do you that for you pretty easily, even if you can't. But perhaps also introducing a couple of other colors. The blue is a lot.

The other thing I thought was that perhaps on the home page, it is very long. It scrolls down for a long way. And so if you switched the Drupal view to be a teaser rather than in full mode, you would be able to see two or three things just above the fold, and it might give more of a sense of like updates rather than, "You really need to read all of this." And again, that should be a setting that if you don't have access to control it yourself, then somebody who has Drupal admin can go in and change it pretty easily.

And I also thought that the sidebars were really long and should just kind of be prioritized. It seemed to me that the "Share this toolbar" which I find up at the top of the right column, it is located there and it also seems to be at the bottom of most, if not all, of the pages. And so I think that you really only need it in one of those places, and that will give you a little bit more space.

The social networking icons, too, that were down low, I think I would just make them smaller, because I think at this point, people who use the social networks recognize the icons. And people who don't recognize the icons and don't use the social networks, you don't want to take up the space with that anyways because you are not talking to them. And so I would make them smaller and move them up higher, possibly even up in the header, maybe right below the "Search this site" box.

And with the change.org network, I don't think I would broadcast only having 22 people in it. I think if they have a button that doesn't show the number of people, that would be better, at least until you have more people in it and it seems like, "Wow! There are 500 people in that network. I should be part of it, too."

And I wasn't sure who was logging in to this website, if it is just staff or if you have regular users that are logging in too. But I think that either way you can save some space in the left column by not putting the username and password fields right there, but just putting a link to another page where people can log in.

And also the menu. The menu is long. There are a lot of things on the top level. And this is another common symptom of the website that has outgrown its structure. I believe seven is the rule of thumb. I think I have heard that if you have more than seven items presented to a person at a time, and this applies to the website navigation as well as any other thing that you have seven of, if there is more than that, then people have to stop and think about what it is. If there is less than that, people can understand it as a unit at a glance.

And so this is generally applied to website navigation with the idea that you want to have seven or fewer links on your top navigation so that people don't get tripped up on it. People can look at it and go, "Oh. That is the navigation," and move on. And then they can stop and read the navigation if they want to. But if there are a lot of things up there, people get tripped up and they think, "Oh, I need to read that." And so that might be a good rule of thumb. Especially because you have got Drupal, it would be relatively easy to just drag and drop the menu items around in the administrative interface and make a little bit of a hierarchy and file some of the things under other things.

And I guess finally, action type. I wasn't quite sure how I was supposed to take action. So that is like a part of the same conversation of prioritizing what is vying for my attention on the home page.

And also, we looked at On Our Own of Maryland. I really like these colors. Blue and orange together are some of my favorites. I felt like it took me a while to figure out what your organization does when I was looking at the website. The first thing I see when I look at it is "Just posted", and that doesn't really tell me anything about the organization. It doesn't even really tell me what is in the content below it.

So I think if that were me, I would take out the words "just posted", and I would probably even take out the words "Save these dates", and I might just put "calendar" or something, or possibly just emphasize the titles of the events more to make a little bit better use of that space over there.

There is a lot of text here, too. And I think that if the text were shorter and/or possibly larger, what I can see here above the fold at a glance, that might also help me understand more, at a glance, about what the organization does.

And I think that more photos of happy people would also be great. I think especially because mental health is the subject of it, having more happy people on there is a great way to convey that we are wanting to care for our mental health.

I threw out some silly phrases which I don't think you would really use, but you get the idea. If you had a tagline or a touchy phrase like, "Mental health is important", or, "Take care of yourself," or something like that in large text, that also might begin conveying the right sentiment to me and get me thinking and feeling in the direction that you probably want me to.

I also noticed that the page titles, when I was navigating the website, which is basically the part in the blue bar at the very, very top of the browser, they were called things like "home", or "about", or "calendar", and they didn't include the website name. So I wanted to just point that out as something that is pretty easy to fix and actually has a pretty big bearing on your search engine results. So if you can get your organization name into those, and/or your tagline if you have one or whatever you decide to use, those will be things that will help the rankings.

I was a little confused by the menu in orange at the top and then also the menu down the left side. It seems like there is overlap but it is not exactly the same. This is part of putting your content in a different bucket. But think about how those things fit together. And I think if you are going to have the menu in two places, that is OK, but it should be the same. Or, I have seen organizations who have a small menu in small text up at the top that might have things like "contact" and "search" and stuff, but in that case it is entirely different from the main navigation. So I would either make it exactly the same or entirely different. The way it is right now is kind of confusing.

I think that you can do a hierarchy too if you need to file some of those things under other things. And it is even fine to show the hierarchy as an actual hierarchy, like looking like an outline format, in the left column if that turns out to be the way that you want to do it. But just by indenting some of the items, that would help it be more clearly related to the main one and it wouldn't be so confusing.

One really great thing about if you could reduce the left side menu would be then you would pull the donate button up above the left fold, because right now it is beneath the menu on the left side. You might even consider it putting it up at the top immediately underneath the On Our Own of Maryland logo. And then you would have the advantage that The Hunger Project has that I mentioned of having the donation button in the same place on every page of the site and easily clickable by people. Then you could take it out of the center column of the homepage, and that gives you a little bit more space for photos of happy people or larger text with more prominent words that stand out, or things like that.

I was thinking that in a similar way to how there is the lighter orange behind the "just posted" in the right column, a different way to present the programs information that is currently in the center might be through blocks with a light background color behind them. And maybe they could even be left to right. I don't know exactly how you are editing the site or what abilities you have to change things, but they might be sort of in two squares next to each other, or possibly still in the same shape that they are in right now but with a little something behind them.

Or maybe you want to put a block of color behind the “It’s OK to take care of yourself” to somehow give that a little focus. Because right now with everything being on a white background, it is just a little hard to know where I am supposed to look and what is the most important thing for me to do. So I guess that goes back to the question of, “What is the most important thing you are trying to get people to do?” and then to play that up a little bit.

Then the last one we looked at was Gesu School, which I think has amazing photographs. This is along the lines of the Hunger Project in terms of just having a lot of assets to work with. It is really visually appealing.

I had a little trouble figuring out what I am supposed to do when I go to the website. It definitely makes me feel positive, but I am not sure what I am supposed to do with that. I know that donating is one of the options, but I think the button wasn’t on all the pages. And so again, that should be pretty easy to get the button on all the pages in the same place.

When I was looking at the code of the website, I saw that most of the words here are in graphics, which makes it very cumbersome or possibly not even possible for you to edit. It looks like you are using Dream Weaver, but I can’t tell what is part of the template and what is not; what you are allowed to edit and what you are not. But it seems like that is difficult or cumbersome to edit.

The other big disadvantage of it is that it is not machine readable, which basically means the search engines can’t see it. And that is some really good words there that can’t be read except by a non-visually impaired person looking at the picture, which is not fantastic from a function perspective.

So one thing you can do to help that a little bit that would be pretty easy is to add an Alt tag for every graphic. Now an Alt tag is if you mouse over a graphic...And most graphics on the internet have this. If you mouse over it, it should pop up a little piece of text that either describes it or in some way indicates what it is. So what I would do with these is I would make Alt texts that repeat the text that is graphically presented over top of it. And that is machine readable, so then that would kind of address the search engine problem. That would kind of address the problem of the visually impaired person trying to use the site.

I think that you could also add some meta keywords in descriptions, which are basically just overviews of what you do. Again, that is not my area of expertise, but there are plenty of resources on the web that have information about keywords, descriptions, meta tags, and things like that that can help with search engine optimization and things like that.

One idea I had for Gesu School, which is probably pretty mid-range, like it is not exactly a simple thing to do, but it would be really fantastic if you were able to find somebody to

help you with it. But it would be to take these fantastic graphics with the photos of the students and the text over them and kind of move them into a Java Script carousel. If anybody looked at the Hunger Project homepage, that is what they have on their homepage. It is the idea that a photo... You would rotate through a set of five or six photos every few seconds, and there is usually some topic that goes along with them.

If those could be combined into a carousel that is not quite as tall, and then some of the main content could be pulled up above the fold, I think that would actually do a lot for both the function and the search engine optimization of the site. And it would also make it a lot easier for whoever is maintaining it to maintain it, because it would pull more of what you may need to change out into a place where you can change it. And the carousel would just be its own thing that went and did its own thing, and you wouldn't need to worry about editing the graphics on all the pages.

So with that, I think we are ready for questions and answers.

Rebecca: Excellent. Thank you so much Margaux. And thank you to everybody who has already send in your questions. But if you haven't sent in a question and you want to know anything or any clarification on any of the content Margaux went over, or just something about your own website that you are curious about, feel free to send us an email. We are checking them ongoing. The email address again is fundraising123@networkforgood.org. But we might as well just dive right in, so thanks everybody who sent questions in so far.

The first one we are going to take is Evelyn's question, and Evelyn says, "With the development of social networking techniques such as online user groups embedded in organizations' websites and independent websites like Facebook and LinkedIn, would you share with us some tips to get more users participating and conversations going?"

Margaux: Thanks Evelyn. That is a good question. Basically, I think that a lot of organizations...it is tempting to try to want to get people to talk to each other on your own website and things like that. And what I find in almost every situation is that Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, all of them are already so huge and people are already using them so much that you don't want to try to reinvent the wheel or compete with that, because it is just not likely to succeed.

So instead, if you can't beat them, join them. So really what I would say is do make a Facebook group if you have somebody in your organization that is using Facebook and is inclined to do that. And that way you can kind of leverage the fact that people are communicating with each other on Facebook to your organizations advantage.

But if you don't have somebody in your organization that is already inclined in that direction, I wouldn't advise spending time on it, because it is better to spend your time and energy on something like content that you can do well.

With that said, if you do have somebody that can do the social networking and can make the groups like that, that would be fantastic. And in that case, all I really think that you would want to do is make links to it from your own website. With Election Defense Alliance, I had mentioned that they have little icons. I would really just make the small icons, because, again, if people recognize those icons, then they know how to use them. And if people don't recognize them, they don't know how to use them. And so you don't want to take space up with them if somebody isn't going to use them. People who know how to use them are generally actually looking for them, not only seeing them and knowing what they are. They are generally actively looking for them.

So I would make that available, but don't focus too much on it. And then if you do have a Facebook group or something like that, go ahead and use it to get in touch with people, but provide them links back to your own website. As long as you provide links for people to click, people will do it.

Rebecca: So now shifting gears a little from social networking to just to touch on search engine optimization, because you mentioned earlier that updating content and even Alt text will help search engines find your content.

We have a question from George, and he says, "I understand the need for your website to be attractive and not cluttered, but how do we get found?"

Margaux: Thanks George. That is a good question. You are right. I did mention search engine optimization. The thing is that people have to be looking for something, and that something needs to match what you are providing. And the beauty of Google is they are actually trying to help people find what it is people are looking for.

So this comes back to the question of being outside and thinking about what people are going to be looking for when they are looking for you, which may not necessarily be the same thing that you think they should be looking for. So this is a place where it might really help to talk to a bunch of people who don't know your organization very well. If they don't already know you and they are not searching for you by name, what would they be looking for that your organization would address?

So again, probably talking to a lot of different people is going to help you figure out what these words are. So then once you figure out what those words are, you want those words to appear a lot on your website.

And without going overboard and making anything that seems unreasonable, you want to have those words appear in the titles of the pages, as well as in the URL, as well as in the body of the pages. If I search for "whale rescue", then something that is going to come up highly is an organization who has got that in their URL, even if it is just worldwildlifefund.org/rescuethewhales. And then if the page title matches that, those things are going to come up high on the list.

And so getting outside and working backwards is going to help you be found by people who don't already know you. With that said, the search engines also love the content. So the more that you can put real content out there and continue updating it, even if it is just once a month we add a new page to say what we have been doing this month, then that will also help, because the more pages you have that seem to match what the person is looking for, the higher you are going to get ranked, too.

This is another road down which I won't go very far other than to mention it, but just to say that if you don't already have an email newsletter that has links to your website, then you should. And this is something that Network for Good can help you with a lot.

Rebecca: You mentioned content management systems, and a couple of the sites we looked at were actually Drupal systems. So Cathy wrote in and asked, "Can a novice utilize Drupal without too much difficulty, or do you need previous experience with content management systems?"

Margaux: I guess there is kind of a two part answer to that. A novice can use Drupal pretty easily. You would not want to try to set it up yourself. Like you would not want to try to download and install Drupal by yourself. But if you had somebody who could do that for you and set it up for you, then you could learn fairly easily yourself to use it, even if you don't have prior experience with a content management system, or even prior experience managing a website at all.

It is fairly intuitive depending on how it is configured, but yes, it is fairly intuitive to the extent where most of the time if you need to edit something that is already there, you just browse around the website and you are logged in, and it recognizes you and it recognizes exactly what you can and can't do on the site. So you browse around and you have a little edit link at the top of the page. And if you want to change it you click "edit". You go down and you have a little text editor that is akin to Microsoft Word. And you make your change and you go down and hit "submit" at the bottom and you are good to go.

Rebecca: Debbie has a navigation question, and she wanted to know, "What is your opinion, Margaux, about web pages that have the dropdown menu when you scroll over an item?"

Margaux: I think what you mean is I have a horizontal bar that is my main navigation, and then I drop down, and then I have a third level that pops out from that. And I think that is fine.

Depending on the system, and there are a million different ways that dropdown menus can be made, like through tools. If you have a static website, there are some tools that you can tack them on with. Some of them are a little more annoying than others in that if you don't put your mouse in exactly the right place, you lose the whole thing.

But apart from that, I think that it is great. I definitely advocate for a third level of content organization in that way over having 10 items in the main menu.

Rebecca: Megan has a great question that I think will apply to a lot of folks on the phone. Megan says, “Our website has two target audiences.” And I am sure some folks on the phone have even more than two. Megan’s in particular caters to two target audiences, donors and researchers. Her organization administers scientific research prizes. “So do you have any tips for appealing to two extremely diverse audiences with the same website?”

Margaux: One of the things that I have seen work well for a lot of organizations is to give people the opportunity to self identify. And so it may have something like, “I am a donor” or “I am a researcher” with something that they can click. And then once they click on that, they get a little bit of a personalized introduction like, “Welcome researcher. We are so glad you have come. These are some of the areas of our website that you will probably find the most useful: A, B, C, D, E, F, G,” and have links from those directly to that section.

And so what it really effectively means is you don’t need to have two separate websites. You basically still have one website that is just the same as it is. But all you are doing is adding a couple of pages where you introduce those audiences, and you direct them to the parts that you think are most relevant for them.

And again, this is where I would absolutely involve them in that conversation. Take aside some of the researchers. “What is it that you want from our website? What do you use our website for now? What would you like to use our website for that you can’t currently? What do you know is there but you have a hard time finding?” Anything like that that you can do to engage them in a conversation not only helps you get a better end product, but it helps them feel more ownership of it as well.

But so basically all you are doing is adding page to introduce, welcome those people, and guide them to the things that they are likely to need. And then you are doing a little something to your homepage to help them find those pages.

And in general, if you can write it from like the “I” perspective, “I am a researcher” or something like that, I think people are a little more likely to latch onto it. That is probably debatable, but that has been my experience.

Rebecca: OK. Our next question comes from Peggy. Peggy would just like to know if, “you can further explain what you meant by improving page titles and include site name, how to do this, that you mentioned with On Our Own of Maryland.” So I think that is a note to the handout.

Margaux: So how to do the pages titles. In terms of how you technically do it, it is going to be pretty different for each website, depending on whether you have a content management system, and if so, which one, or whether you have a static page. So I don’t think I can really answer that question from a technical perspective.

But from the search engine optimization perspective, I will give you an example of something that is not good and then let you work backwards to figure out what I am talking about. Hopefully this will work.

So basically, let's say that you are an organization who is encouraging people to share their story with you. Maybe you have cancer survivors and you want people to share their story with you.

So you have a whole section of your website that features peoples' stories. And if they are titled "My story" and the blue bar at the top says, "My story", and then your URL is organization.org/mystory, this is not very descriptive about what is actually happening on that page and what information is there. It is true that it is a story; it is true. But there are so many stories on the Internet that you are competing with however many bagillion other stories there are out there, and you are really not likely to win that contest with Google.

What would be better is something like, "Anne in San Francisco beats breast cancer," or something that is way more specific. In that case, you are narrowing it down enough by adding enough other words that you are being much more specific. You are still competing with breast cancer, which obviously is a large thing on the web, but at least you are not competing with "my story". And at least when I read that title, if I get search engine results and I see in the title, "Anne in San Francisco beats breast cancer," I am pretty sure without even clicking that I know what that is about. And so I know that I want to click on it and I want to read it.

So what I was saying is that that is the kind of title you want all of your pages on your website to have. And so you want the blue bar to show that. You want that to be in the URL, like the URL of that would be, "organization.org/anne_breast_cancer" or something. And you probably don't want to make the URL super long, but whatever. Pick a couple of those main words from the title and put them there too, because Google is going to look in the URL, they are going to look in the page title, and then they are going to look in the body of that page as well. And the more they match, the higher up on the list you are going to show. I hope that answers your question.

Rebecca: OK. Our next question comes from Rita. And this is kind of a philosophical website question. Rita's question starts with an explanation. She says, "We have a membership conflict on our website. For a yearly donation, members can access the social network as well as premium content. We are considering opening up the membership to the public with or without a donation. Board members are concerned that we will lose our income stream by opening up the premium content to the public, but others believe it will drive more traffic, and then more donations will follow from that. Do you have any suggestions about open versus closed communications on a website?"

Margaux: Well philosophically speaking, I think that there definitely are different schools of thought, and I think what it is really going to come down to is what your organization feels is right depending on who your people are. And without knowing too

many details about that, I am hesitant to comment, other than I am in favor, personally, of having it be open. Maybe the right way to make more people happy with that is to figure out in what other way membership could have a financial value.

But just also from a search engine perspective, if the premium content is able to be indexed by the search engines, that is going to help you. It is going to help more people find you. So there is certainly an argument to be made on that side. But having worked in membership organizations myself in the past, I also very much see the argument from the other side, too. So I don't know. I guess that means I am abstaining but putting forth a lot of thought. [laughs]

Rebecca: Marsha says, "One promotion for this particular teleconference that I read was the fact that websites have gone from static promotion to active communication. How frequently do you suggest updating your website and how do you notify people of updates on the site? With "Just updated" or what? Do you have suggestions?"

Margaux: I feel like there is probably a pretty broad range of when would make sense to update a website. I think it could be as little as once a month, and people would probably still feel like you are pretty active.

I would try to approach it with a plan, basically an outline of, "Once a week I am going to write something," or, "Once a month I am going to write something," and actually put it on your calendar to make sure that it gets done, because it is really hard. And I personally am really terrible at it, so I will be the first to tell you it is difficult.

But if you have a really big organization and you are doing a lot of things, then you may be able to put a couple updates up a day and be fine. It depends a lot on how many people you have got contributing to it.

But I think that if you are inserting something once a month or more, then that is going to be great for people knowing that you are active. And I don't think...I think in general we, societally, as a web society, are kind of moving away from the new flag, or the "just updated" flag, or something like that, because I think that the date on it stands for itself, so that you can come to the website and it doesn't need a "new" flag because it is dated last week. Then I know that was last week.

So I would think that probably the bigger thing would be just making sure that whatever is newly added is itself somehow reflected on the homepage. Whether you actually have put that thing on the homepage or you have just put a link to it on the homepage is less important as just the fact that it is there, that people can see it kind of up front and center.

Something that I meant to say, and I think I probably put it in my slides and then forgot to say it. When I was looking at the Election Defense Alliance, and On Our Own, and the Gesu School, one idea that I had that really could apply to them or anybody really is that if you don't have right now the ability, technically, to update your website yourself, or very easily, then one thing that might get you a lot of mileage is to have a blog on a

separate tool. I know Word Press offers it, and I imagine that others do too. But if you have a Word Press blog, you can get a little widget, which is basically like a box, that you can put into your website. And you may need help to get that box in there depending on how your website is set up. But what that box does is automatically pull content from your blog and show it on your website. So that is kind of a way around if you don't have the technical ability to be updating your own website directly very often.

That way you can show that on your homepage and it is going to automatically put your new blog entry there, and it is going to showcase the fact that you are up to date.

Rebecca: Great. You actually covered Laura's question in there because she wanted to know a little bit more about using external pieces like that and in what scenarios. So that is a great example of when you might use something like a widget.

Margaux: And I think a calendar is also another time that that could be particularly useful. I have also seen some organizations do it with photos, although in my experience that is a little more hit and miss because it depends on...I mean I guess I would just think about how you are doing it and what the result is going to be. Because if you are doing user submitted photos, for example, you pretty much don't have any control over what is showing up there and you may end up with a lot of far away. "Here is a crowd of people across the mall and I have no idea who they are." Great. That doesn't really add anything to my website. Whereas if you can do that with, for example, your own Flickr gallery or something like that, then you can say, "We are only going to have 10 photos in here, but they are all going to be fantastic."

I mentioned earlier a Java Script carousel which basically rotates through a couple of photos and may include text. I am pretty sure that I have actually seen external third party sites where you can go and kind of just put your own photos in and make your own carousel, and then they give you a bit of code that you can stick in your website. Which again, depending on your situation, you might need somebody to help you with, but it would be pretty quick to put that code in your website. And then that carousel would show up there too. That would be another good third party tool that you could use.

Rebecca: Great. Well we have just about hit the hour mark, so I just want to stick in a couple last pieces of information just to add onto what Margaux has already spoken about. And then maybe we will sneak in one last summarizing question to round out the training.

So for those of you who do have to hop off right now, thank you for joining us. A couple of the topics that Margaux touched on, as she said, you can find more information about those in our learning center. So I encourage you to visit fundraising123.org. And in particular, we had a couple of other Nonprofit 911 calls. We had one on June 16th of this year about creating web copy and actually writing for the web. Margaux mentioned that writing for the web and writing for print are different, so we have some great tips and tools in there, and strategies, that you will want to employ.

So if you go to nonprofit911.org and find the June 16 training, that could help you out there. And for those of you who have other questions about Drupal and other content management systems, we actually had a content management system roundtable on August 4. So again, you can visit there and we have our transcripts posted. So feel free to check those out. And I will be sure to include links to those at the end of the week also.

But with that, I would like to just round out with one question just kind of to summarize the call a little bit. For those folks who don't have the budget or, unfortunately, the fulltime staff to undergo a full makeover, do you have a couple of tips, steps, or particular ideas that folks can do just to at least give their site a nudge in the right direction to get them going after this call?

Margaux: Well, I think what I would do is think about it and talk about it with people, because that is a really good way to get energy, excitement, and some ideas out there running.

When you get a bunch of ideas, try to just pick a couple so that you don't get overwhelmed. That is also kind of the same concept when I spoke earlier to how often to update your website and have some kind of plan that you can follow, because it helps you to not bite off more than you can chew. And then keeping it realistic is a helpful way to make it more likely to actually happen.

We tend to have a joke about a website never really being done, because it is true. It is a live animal. It is not like something that you send to press and it is printed and it is on your shelf. It is very much a living thing. So doing it in phases is perfectly acceptable, and in fact, advisable, because it gives you something to communicate to people about. That is an opportunity to send out your email list. "Hey, look what you can do on our website now. Look at how our website can help you now that we added this new feature." And then a couple months later, "Look at how it can help you now that we have added this new feature."

So baby steps are good, but to the extent that you can think about a bigger picture, too, so that you know that those baby steps are moving you in the direction you want to be going.

Rebecca: Wonderful. Well thanks again to everybody for joining us today. And in particular, thank you Margaux for joining us and leading our call today.

Margaux: Thank you for having me.