

FREE EBOOK

“My website needs a redesign. Where do I start?”

Take these 8 steps toward the website of your dreams.



INTRODUCTION

Maybe you've rebranded, and your website no longer matches. Or the navigation is clunky. Or the pages take too long to load.

Maybe your website visitors want to do things they can't, like make an online donation or a purchase or register for an event.

Maybe your website looks like it was built 10 years ago, which is ancient in the world of technology, and people bounce on your outdated homepage like it's a trampoline.

Whatever the reasons, you've concluded your organization's website needs a refresh, redesign or complete overhaul—or you're contemplating the possibility. And you might be feeling intimidated by the process or overwhelmed by your options. (There are a lot of options.)

That's why you're here, and that's why we wrote this guide—to walk you through the steps to creating the website of your dreams. It's time to stop losing sleep over a website that's not working and get one built to work as hard as you do while turning heads at the same time.

A new website with beauty and brains—it's possible if you follow these eight steps.



STEP 1:

Identify your goals

The first question to ask (and answer) is, “What do I want to accomplish with a website redesign?”

Do you want to enable online donations or e-commerce—or improve your payment processing system? Do you want to offer online event registration? Do you want to create a resources section so you can provide more education to your visitors? Or do you simply want to update your website’s look and feel with a more modern vibe?

It’s important to have crystal clear reasons and goals for redesigning your website because that will direct your next steps.

Also, here’s a good place for this reminder: Your website is your only owned and operated online property—unlike your social media platforms. You may get good engagement on Instagram, LinkedIn or even Facebook and think, “I’ll just invest all my energy in optimizing our social accounts.” But it’s important to remember that companies like Meta and LinkedIn (or TikTok or X, etc.) make the rules of engagement, and they can change rules and algorithms at any time, which means you and your engagement with your followers are at their mercy.

And that takes us back to your website—the platform where you and your org or business get to call the shots. This is the place that’s worthy of your investment and optimization, because it’s not “rented” property; it’s your own online home. Whether it’s a fixer-upper or in need of a few design updates, your website is the platform most worthy of your time, attention and investment.

STEP 2:

Evaluate current content & design

The next question to ask is, “What is currently working—or not—with our website as is?”

Once you’ve determined your goals for a redesign, it’s time to evaluate which parts of your current website are aligned with them. This is a little like going through your closet to decide what to keep and what to toss into a “get rid of” pile.

Start with your website analytics: They’ll tell you what sections or pages your visitors tend to linger on and which make them bounce. Your analytics will help you do a content audit, which is just a fancy name for a review. Which content seems to resonate with your visitors? The numbers will tell you.

Also ask yourself, “What content is going to help us achieve our goals?” If you have existing white papers, blog articles or other types of resources with valuable information and one of your goals is to provide more education for your audience, this content may be important to hold on to, even if they haven’t seen a lot of engagement. It could be that a redesigned resources section is all you need to get more eyes on them.

On the other hand, if you have pages that are rarely visited or don’t retain users for longer than a few seconds, it may be time to leave them behind when you transition to an updated site.

Next, think “SEO.” An SEO review of your current website content will help you determine what content is already optimized for search engines and what could be rewritten with more relevant keywords in order to get in good with the likes of Google and Bing. If you have content with what we call good “SEO juice”—it’s already written and optimized with both your end users and search engines in mind—that will be important to retain and migrate over to your redesigned site.

It’s like moving to a new physical home—what’s important to take with you and what can you leave behind? Remember your goals and consult your analytics.

STEP 3:

Develop your content strategy

If you take away anything from this guide, let it be this: **Build your website and its content for your online visitors, not for your business or organization.**

One more time: Build your website for outsiders. Not for your org's insiders.

How do you do this? By paying less attention to your coworkers' and colleagues' wish lists and more attention to what your end users want. Here are five things that can help:

1. Refer to your SEO audit. What content has resonated most? Make more of that.
2. Pay attention to social media comments or emails you've received—are people asking for something you haven't provided or more of something you have?
3. Send an email survey or create a social post asking your audience what they want to see on your new website. Go straight to the source.
4. Post a survey on your current website asking visitors how your site could be improved. What would they like to see?

Hold an online or in-person focus group and include people who are in your target audience(s). Ask them for ideas, suggestions and feedback about your current website and how they would improve it.

It's so easy (whether you're a for-profit or a nonprofit) to get sidetracked by what co-workers and colleagues want, but ultimately, your website is not built to engage with them—it's to engage with your supporters or customers.

Once you have a good idea of what your new website needs according to the people you want to use it, you can plan a content strategy accordingly.

STEP 4:

Decide on UX and design

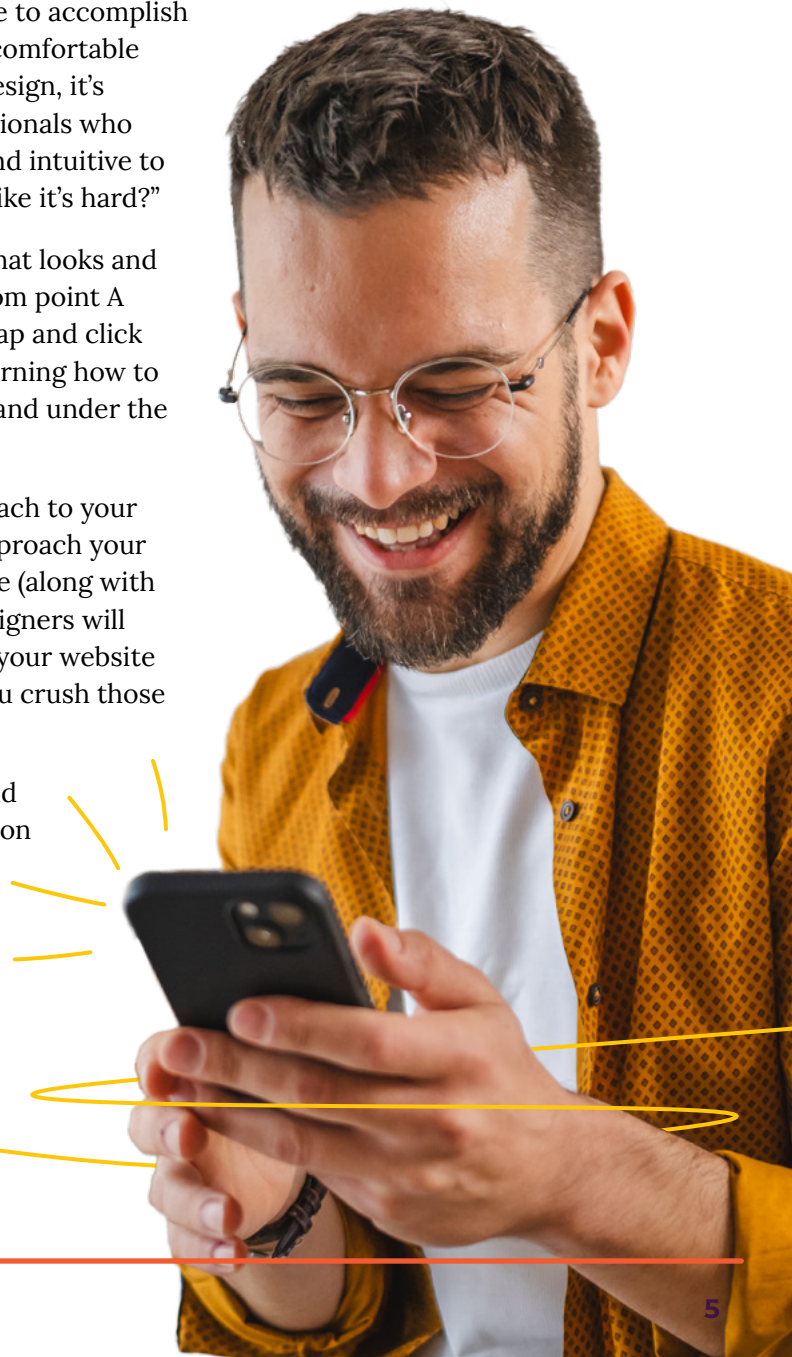
This step is all about the way your website is structured (UX) and how it looks (visual design), and like the previous step, you want your UX and design decisions to be user-centric. By keeping your audience top of mind during this phase, you'll be able to meet their needs in the most effective ways possible.

Real talk: Up to this point, it's likely that you'll be able to accomplish the previous steps on your own, especially if you're comfortable with numbers and analytics. But with UX and web design, it's important to get outside of your org and use professionals who really know their stuff. The best websites are easy and intuitive to navigate, which might mislead you to think, "What, like it's hard?"

Yes. The answer is yes, it is hard to build a website that looks and functions like a well-oiled machine, leading users from point A to point B without making them think too much or tap and click around. UX and design professionals spend years learning how to make it look easy, but their work behind the scenes and under the hood is anything but.

Visual designers can recommend a new visual approach to your brand elements, colors, fonts, etc. because they'll approach your website with fresh eyes and an outsider's perspective (along with their creative skills and expertise, of course). UX designers will create intuitive user flows and interfaces that make your website easy to navigate and engage with, which will help you crush those goals you set in step one.

Our strongest recommendation at this stage is to find professionals who are skilled in these areas and rely on their expertise and recommendations.



STEP 5:

Create your content

By this point, you've decided what existing content to bring with you to your new and improved website. But you'll likely have some blank spaces to fill, so decision time: Who's going to create the rest of the content you need?

A team approach typically works best—you can spread the work around and tap the right people for the right job. Know a videographer or content creator who has a knack for making Instagram Reels or Tik Toks? Enlist that person to make the videos. You may be able to use some stock photography for images (if you need to), but to make your website uniquely yours and as personable as possible, find a few people who can snap some great photos and tap them to start taking pictures.

As for writing your website content, you can rely on a team approach here, as well—even enlisting the help of generative AI, like Chat GPT. But fair warning: Only use gen AI to help you get started; don't use it as your “copywriter” or content writer. Google has started penalizing websites that solely use generative AI content without a human to revise and edit as necessary—you don't want to end up getting dinged in search results. Also, just as with images and photos, you want your website content to sound like you, not just any generic business or nonprofit. So, using actual humans who know your brand and your mission to write your website content is the best way to achieve this.

You can use insiders or outsource or a combination of both, but it's good to have one editor or QA person that all your content flows through in order to ensure your voice is consistent, concise and error-free.

And one more reminder: Create your content with (say it with us!) **your end user in mind.**



STEP 6:

Put your plans in action

Now comes the fun part: You get to see all your hard work come to life in the form of a beautiful, robust, fully functioning website.

You have options. Lots of options. For the sake of simplicity, we're going to narrow your options down into three buckets.

- 1. Low- or no-code platforms like Squarespace and Wix.** These are typically easy and inexpensive options that allow even tech novices to create a beautiful website with some good functionality—but they will come with limitations. One, these platforms may not allow you to include all the bells and whistles your customers and constituents are asking for. And two, if you're approaching your website as a DIY project, you will be limited by your own understanding of UX and design. There's another hat you'd have to wear! And you probably have enough to wear already.
- 2. WordPress.** This is a more flexible option, but you want to go into a WordPress project knowing that you'll likely require the assistance of a WordPress expert. This platform has its own set of knowledge and skills, so it's important to use a WordPress expert in order to get the most out of your investment. You could learn WordPress yourself and adopt the knowledge and skills it takes to use it effectively, but it'll probably make you cry—plus, it's another hat. This is a great option, though, that can be cost-effective and lead you to a stunning, robust website. If you choose this route, take it from us: Get an expert who knows their way around the WordPress platform and which plugins you'll need to accomplish your goals.
- 3. A web development agency that has created a platform and templates specifically for your space.** Take Firespring, for example—we have deep roots in the nonprofit space and understand what constituents and supporters want from an org's website because we've been in the business of nonprofit websites for over 30 years. That's a lot of time to study, research, grow and develop into an expert in this area. The benefit here is that you get to work closely with a company that can help you hit the ground running. Firespring has built a platform specifically for nonprofit orgs with a CMS that allows anyone to make changes and updates without the help of a developer, so you're already set up for success before you even begin.

Most web development agencies also provide free support, which is helpful when you run into an issue and you need to talk to a live person. Before you say, “Nah, this is too expensive for our business or org,” do your research! You will likely be surprised at how affordable this can be, as well as all the extras that come with it.

You have choices, to be sure, but one word of advice: Choose an option that frees you up to do what you love, so you're not stuck trying to do tedious tasks that suck your soul dry. In the long run, investing in experts is worth it.

STEP 7:

Make it accessible

This is actually something you should start thinking about from the beginning, but we wanted to give accessibility its own section here to express how important this is. Your website is only user-friendly if it's built for all users. So, yes, you want a beautiful website that's robust and modern—but if it's not built with your entire audience in mind, regardless of ability, you're falling below today's standard. Even search engines now favor websites that are accessible. If you're a nonprofit serving a community of people with disabilities who may need to engage with your website in different ways, this is especially crucial for you.

For example, did you know that over 13% of the U.S. population has a visual impairment? Even little things like the colors you use throughout your site can make a big difference. To learn more accessibility, grab [our free ebook](#) that talks about the small changes you can make to ensure that your website meets certain accessibility standards. And if this is something you'd rather leave to experts who know the ins and outs of accessibility, that's a great call, and we'd be happy to help.

STEP 8:

Give it all a good QA

Your dream is almost a reality once you've completed the previous seven steps, and you're ready to push the Go Live button! But before you open your new website to the public, you want to be sure that it's operating well.

- Do all your links work?
- Do the CTA buttons take users where they want to go?
- Is the navigation all clear and fully functional?
- Is your content error-free?
- Do the videos play correctly?

Form a team of people who will go through your entire website to test everything on every page. Important: Do not skip this crucial step! We've seen too many businesses and orgs push their website live out of eager anticipation, only to learn of several glitches and errors from their website visitors, and ouch—that's not who you want reporting negative issues. You have one chance to make a great first impression.

Where are you in your decision-making process now?

That will determine which way to head at this point.

If you're convinced that your brand's website is ready for a facelift, refresh or major overhaul, you're at the "ask an expert" stage. At Firespring, we have several website experts who can offer all kinds of valuable insight and advice, and they'd be happy to chat with you—no expectations, no sales pitch, no pressure. You can sign up for a free consultation [here](#) to talk through your goals, your needs and your options.

If you're unsure about whether or not you're ready for a website redesign, we'll review your site and offer suggestions on what your next steps could be.

Either way, Firespring is always about education without expectation, and we have several other ebooks, webinars, blog articles and other resources to guide you in your decision-making journey. [Find more at Firespring.com.](#)

