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# Best Practices: A Primer for Website Project Planning

## Websites Designed with Members in Mind

Perception is reality and in today's highly competitive market, a positive first impression goes a long way in determining whether or not a call or visit takes place at your club. For the more than 70% of consumers who conduct an Internet search prior to visiting and selecting a club, first impressions are formed by the first experience or interaction they have with your website. Experts argue a club website is the single most important vehicle for attracting and engaging members. We couldn't agree more, particularly in light of the current trends and challenges in membership development.

### **Form Should Fit Function:**

That said, not all websites are created equal, but all good websites do have at least three common traits; 1) they're designed with a specific audience in mind; 2) they're structured in ways that make getting to content easy for the user; and 3) they're kept up-to-date with timely changes to the content that populates the site. Keep in mind that websites serve many roles, and as such, form should follow function as it relates to the design and the organization of content. Take online travel sites for example. They're essentially commerce sites and therefore are designed to facilitate a transaction like booking a flight or making a reservation, hence you'll see lots of pull-down menus, special fare offers, and other variable-based features. Leisure clubs on the other hand, albeit country clubs, yacht clubs, or city clubs, are an entirely different segment all together. They're focused on attracting and serving a very narrow slice of the consumer market; generally speaking, affluent, active, and often times discerning consumers with lifestyle interests largely centered around social and recreational activities. The principal "function" of a club website should be more "experiential" certainly than it is commercial or transactional. Meaning, the design needs to be appealing, if not compelling, brand image of quality and excellence; some might even suggest exclusivity, casual elegance, and privilege in the case of private member-based clubs. There are many, many aspects to a website design project and while each is worthy of some level of discussion, we'll focus this article on the primer material. So whether you're just starting out with your first website project or in the throws of a major redesign of an existing club website, here are a few pointers to consider before going into your next planning meeting:

### **Define Your Objectives:**

Be clear about why you need a website, the objectives assigned to it, and how it will benefit your club. For example, you can't expect the website to sell memberships, but you can assign an objective to it. One reasonable objective might be to build or enhance a contact database of prospective new members that visit your website and/or inquire about your club. This would have tremendous value both short and long term, and with very measurable benefits. The bottom line is to be clear on what role your website is expected to serve, and communicate as it will have a profound impact on the look, feel, and navigation of the finished project, and ultimately, its ability to deliver measurable results.

### **Consider and Know Your Audience:**

The audience you are planning to serve through the website is just as important a consideration as what you hope to accomplish with it. A design built around attracting new members will likely be very different than one created to promote your facilities for private function use or to sell homes within the community. Similarly, if attracting and capturing new members is the objective, consider the profile of the member you're seeking to attract. Young, active families for example will have a less than favorable reaction to a website designed with more mature retirees in mind.

### **Design to Standout, Not Fit In:**

Value, defined by the quality of the service, amenities and the member experience is what ensures member satisfaction and retention. Don't go by way of tradition, popular opinion or design templates that commoditize the appearance of your club. Instead, dare to be different and unique. We're not talking outrageous and bleeding edge type stuff; simply tasteful, compelling and engaging design that reflects the essence of your club, highlights its unique features and distinguishing characteristics, captures the imagination of visitors, and invites further exploration, both online and on site.

### **Keep It Real and Relevant:**

If you want new and existing members to visit and return to your site, then you need to give them a good reason for doing so. Nothing draws more site visits and high usage than timely, relevant content. When you think about it, it's not dissimilar to what drives members to the club. Members visit your club because they become aware of and elect to participate in events and activities that are aligned with their lifestyle interests. The same holds true of websites designed with members in mind. Your website carries a tremendous burden in that it needs to cater to the specific interests of certain members (those most interested in golf for example) while simultaneously appealing broadly to all members. Done properly, active, timely content management will yield the single biggest payoff from your investment in a website, member empowerment.

*For more information on website design best practices call MembersFirst at 866.636.3477 or visit us at [www.memfirst.com](http://www.memfirst.com) and request a personal one-on-one demo today. Written by: Pete Diffendal, MembersFirst, Inc.*