



# THE WEBSITE REDESIGN PLAYBOOK

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*Perhaps it's taste, or a thirst for "new," or just a need for change. Whatever it is, websites date themselves. Pivotal technology moments, like the advent of "responsive," are part of the driver. But let's face it: we simply don't stay happy for long.*

There's always one more thing to be done, one last tweak, one idea half-articulated at the 11th hour. And those small things accumulate until we are finding ourselves using the "R" word again.

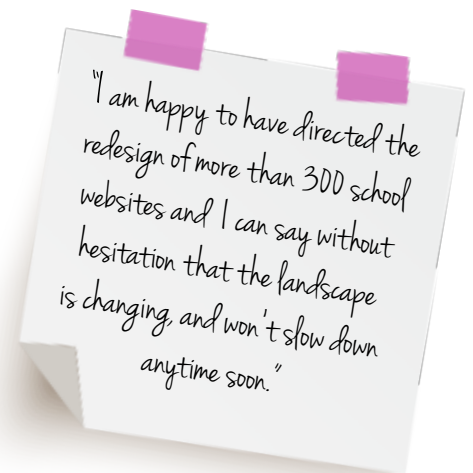
Redesign. It makes even the strongest of us shudder.

It doesn't need to be that way. Truth be told, in the ideal world (in which none of us live, of course!), we'd be in a constant state of redesigning—adjusting layouts, buttons, calls-to-action—based on how users interact with the site, testing options and taking more data-driven approaches. Some of you may already be doing that. Plenty of studies out there suggest that a slight placement change on a graphic can have a dramatic difference in success of that page.

But let's get the ship in order first. We've put this website redesign playbook together to explain a process that works and which will make your life easier along the way, ideas and tips for ending up with the best site possible, and above all, confidence that you can do this and never shudder again.

Good Luck!

Angelo Otterbein  
Chief Innovation Officer



"I am happy to have directed the redesign of more than 300 school websites and I can say without hesitation that the landscape is changing, and won't slow down anytime soon."





# SECTION ONE

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## IS IT TIME FOR A REDESIGN?

# State of the Industry



50%

of searches are done  
on mobile devices



2 hours

The amount of time  
the average American  
spends on their  
mobile device every  
day



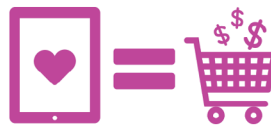
57%

The percentage of  
users who will not  
recommend  
companies with poor  
mobile sites



.05 seconds

The amount of time it  
takes for a user to  
form an opinion on  
your site once the  
page loads



67%

The percentage of  
people more likely to  
buy a product or use  
a service after having  
a positive experience  
with your mobile  
website



40%

of mobile users will  
choose a different  
search result if the  
first is not  
mobile-friendly



3 seconds

40% of users will  
abandon a web page  
if it takes more than  
3 seconds to load



10 seconds

The amount of time  
you have to leave an  
impression on and  
prove your value to a  
user before they  
leave your site



5 billion

The number of  
people who will be  
using mobile phones  
by 2017



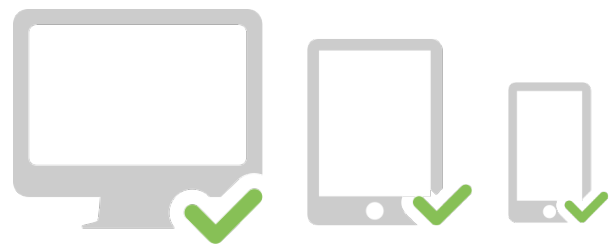
# Is It Time For a Redesign?\_\_\_\_\_

Whether it's complacency or competition, some schools redesign on a yearly basis. And while not everyone's budget and timeline allows that kind of annual refinement, there are **four sure signs that it's time for a redesign.**

# You're Not Responsive

It's good for your SEO, better maintains your brand, provides a more memorable and engaging experience, and most importantly, your audience expects it. Responsive design is no longer a web design trend, but a web design necessity. And since Google's search algorithms favor responsive designs on mobile devices, you'll find yourself in a more favorable position if your site passes their mobile-friendly test.

**Responsive Web Design (RWD)** means that your website is optimized for viewing across multimedia platforms: desktops, smartphones, and tablets.



## What's the big deal about responsive design, anyway?

Responsive design provides your users with an optimal viewing experience with minimal resizing, panning, and scrolling across a wide range of devices.

Other than looking completely awesome on every device - tablets, smartphones, laptops and desktops - responsive design also is good for your SEO, will create a positive (and memorable) user experience, you'll lower your bounce rates, and of course, you'll have a website worth bragging about.



The percentage of users who won't recommend companies with poor mobile sites.



The percentage of users who are more likely to buy a product or use a service if they have a positive user experience.



In an age of going green, digital tools play a pivotal role for most independent school marketing departments. If your school has recently rebranded, those changes need to be made on your site. New logos, colors, and fonts should transcend from brand boards and printed materials to your website almost instantly to maintain brand consistency.

## How to Rebrand: As Told by Westtown School

Before they redesigned their website, the communications team at Westtown sat down to redesign and redefine their brand parameters. "We redesigned more than just our website," said Lynette Assarsson, Associate Director of Communication. "We hired a designer to streamline the look of our print materials, including our magazine. Out of that, a style guide was created and we followed it."

The designer created a new nameplate, as well as defined three main colors and five accent colors that Westtown School could use in their marketing materials. "Very quickly we reined it all in to build a website that reflects our new print materials because we wanted them to match and have brand consistency," said Lynette.



## Website Traffic Is Down

Numbers don't lie. If you're seeing website traffic drop, it may be because your site needs a facelift. Even if you have the best academics in the state, no institution can simply rest on its laurels. Stale content, non-responsive designs, and out-dated photos aren't a true representation of what your school has to offer.

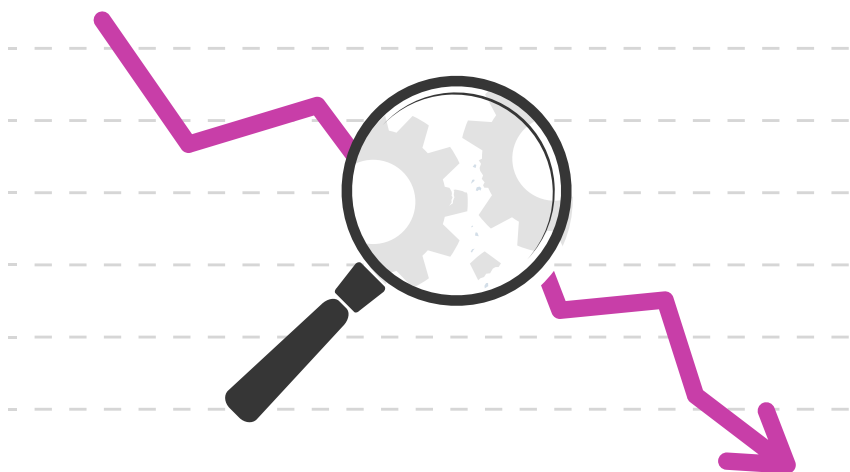
### What's the role of responsive design in website traffic?

The majority of Finalsité schools see a hefty portion of their traffic come from mobile devices: an average of 22-37% of website traffic comes from smartphones, and an average of 11-18% comes from tablets.

*Some schools see up to 50% of their website traffic coming from mobile devices.*

Google algorithms favor mobile-friendly websites in search, meaning if your website is not responsive, it automatically ranks lower in search.

The result? You're going to see less traffic to your site in unbranded searches like "best private schools near me."





## There's No "Story"

Movies with confusing plot lines, jokes without a punch line, websites without a story — they're one in the same. They leave you feeling bored and that you wasted a little time.

*You can have the greatest SEO and PPC campaigns in the industry, but if they link to a website that lacks emotion and dimension, it's a total loss.*

### How do I know if my website is lacking a "story?"

1) Do you have more photos or text content? ☐ Photos ☐ Text ☐ It's about equal

*Visual content is more engaging, informative and interesting than text content, increasing conversions.*

2) How old are your photos/videos? \_\_\_\_\_

*Photos should be updated on a yearly basis at a minimum.*

3) What are your website photos featuring? ☐ People ☐ Campus ☐ A combination

*Website photos should focus on showcasing the student experience. Faces make a bigger impact than buildings.*

4) Are there student or faculty testimonials? ☐ Yes ☐ No

*Testimonials are proven to be one of the most effective content strategies for persuasive storytelling.*

The percentage by which  
color visuals increase  
willingness to read by:

**80%**

**28%**

of words on a web page are  
actually read on the average  
page visit.

When you add visuals to text,  
the amount people  
remember increases by:

**60%**

# Website Analysis Quiz

*Not sure if your school needs a new website? Take this brief website analysis quiz, guided by the top trends steering web design, to determine if it's time for a redesign.*

## 1. Users don't "read" the web anymore.

*You have about 7 seconds to capture your website visitor's attention.*

Online readers are conditioned to skip around on your website, looking for keywords related to what they came for — and if they can't find it, they leave.

Is important website content, like tuition, easy to find on your website?

☐ YES

☐ NO

Is your website responsive, or is there a mobile version?

☐ YES

☐ NO

## 2. Mobile traffic is exceeding desktop traffic.

*More than half of all website traffic comes from mobile devices like smart phones and tablets. To reach and engage your audience, your website should have a responsive design or mobile version.*

## 3. Visual content increases engagement.

*Visitors spend 100% more time on pages with videos. Effective websites use photos and videos to tell their story, rather than using text.*

Does your website rely heavily on visual content?

☐ YES

☐ NO

Does your homepage include call-to-action buttons?

☐ YES

☐ NO

## 4. Visitors need to be told what to do.

*Your website should be like directions on a map. Don't make your user think about where they should go next, how to apply or where to find more information. Every click they make on your website should have a purpose and help them get one step closer to what they want.*

## 5. Users' standards are higher than ever.

*First impressions are 94% design related. Today's users are overloaded with digital content, so if your website doesn't meet the standard they've become accustomed to, your school will appear less credible and desirable — despite your reputation.*

Does your homepage "dress to impress?"

☐ YES

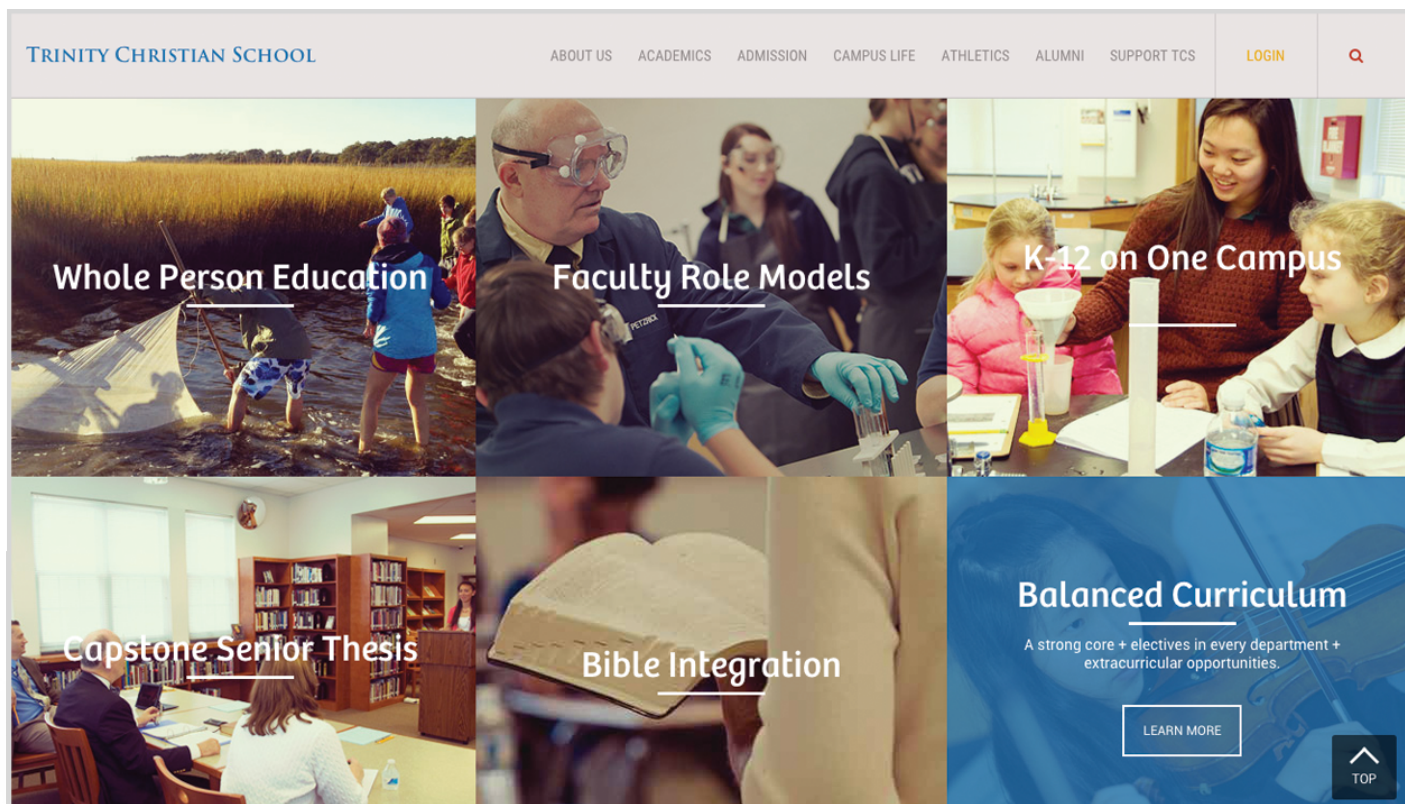
☐ NO

# Modern Web Design Trends\_\_\_\_\_

If it's time for a redesign, it's important to educate yourself on the latest in the industry before you get started.

From cool new scrolling effects to the ever-growing popularity of responsive design, scoping out what's new will give you a starting point.





## Modular Layouts

With the rise of responsive design, modular or grid layouts – also called cards or tiles – have become on trend in web design due to their layout flexibility. They're a great way to combine social feeds, calls to action, photos and videos into one grid-like homepage that doesn't involve scrolling. Elements can be arranged into stackable blocks or groups, which is a nice feature when optimizing your website for multiple devices. So, we think, these offer the best of both worlds.

## Noteworthy Examples

[Dresden International School](#)  
[St. Francis School](#)  
[Trinity Christian School](#)  
[Lawrence Academy](#)  
[Galloway School](#)

*Pro tip: Modular layouts can create a mash-up feel. Combine different media and contrasting colors to create a highly segmented look.*



## Parallax Scrolling

It's trendy, interactive, and just straight-up cool. Nike [coined this type of design treatment](#) back in 2011, and since then it has become more popular with industry-leading sites. Parallax scrolling is a special type of design treatment where the background moves at a slower pace than what is in the foreground, creating a 3D effect as you scroll down the page.

Since parallax scrolling is typically associated with top-tier companies, when your website features this kind of cutting-edge design, your school will immediately be seen as a leader. Plus, it gives you a way to share more of your school's story with photos and text, without making your homepage feel cluttered.

## Noteworthy Examples

[Providence Day School](#)

[The Episcopal School of Dallas](#)

[St. Anne's-Belfield School](#)

[St. Joseph's Preparatory School](#)







# Educating future leaders.

Students graduate from Episcopal equipped with skills to succeed in top universities and beyond.

## Vertical Storytelling and Longer Pages

Popular social media websites such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Twitter have turned scrolling into breathing to the modern user — you don't even realize that you're doing it. And better yet, scrolling allows you to tell your school's story more efficiently. These designs fill up your browser window horizontally and invite you to scroll vertically, allowing your website user to engage with a lot of content without a lot of clicks!

### Noteworthy Examples

[The Episcopal Academy](#)

[Baylor School](#)

[Asheville School](#)

[St. George's School](#)

[Rowland Hall](#)

[St. Mary's Episcopal School](#)

*Pro tip: Combine different kinds of content, like photos, news, media and infographics to inform and engage.*



## Flat Design

Flat design refers to the removal or reduction in texture, shadow and 3D effects in favor of a clean, minimalistic design. Think of simple icons and images similar to those popularized with Apple's release of iOS7; flat design goes hand-in-hand with responsive design.

Flat design elements are quite versatile, as they can often be scaled up infinitely to look good on retina screens. And, as designs shrink down on mobile devices, simpler graphics are more readable and feel modern, fresh and content-focused. Designs that rely heavily on 3D effects or that try to make site elements look like real objects will look outdated as flat design increases in popularity.

## Noteworthy Examples

[Loomis Chaffee School](#)

[Guilford College](#)

[Charlotte Country Day School](#)

*A best-case use for flat design is within infographics.*





## Fixed Elements

A fixed element is an element that remains in place as you scroll down the page. Blending fixed elements with interactive elements allows for greater design variation and, more importantly, keeps a CTA or other important information front and center on longer scrolling pages.

Fixed elements are also commonly used as a “sticky menu.” Sticky menus are navigation elements that stay in one location on a site even when the user moves a webpage up or down. Having a site’s navigation options always present is a great UI feature that allows users to quickly navigate around your site or page without having to scroll back to the top of the page.

## Noteworthy Examples

[St. Paul's School for Girls](#)

[Westtown School](#)

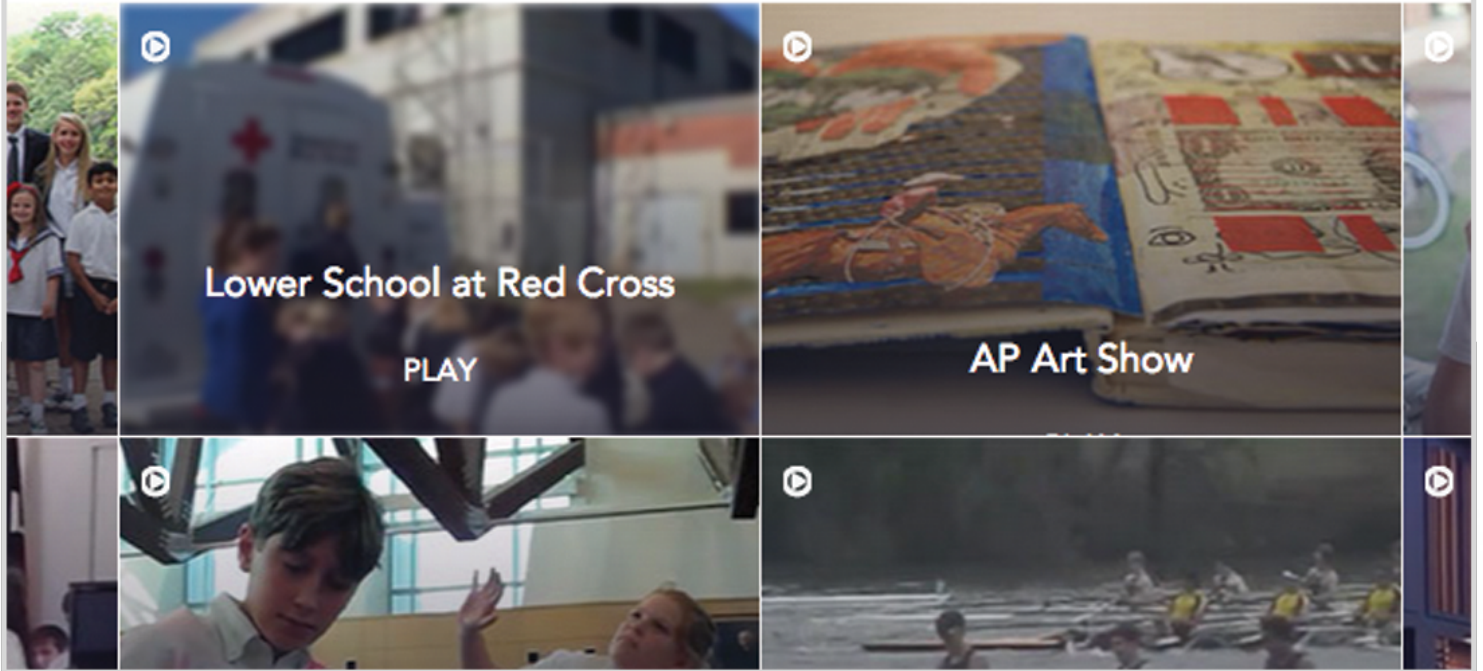
[ESOL Education](#)

[Rye Country Day School](#)

*Try this! Have the look of your navigation change as the user scrolls down for a cool added effect.*

# EXPERIENCES AT ESD

media gallery



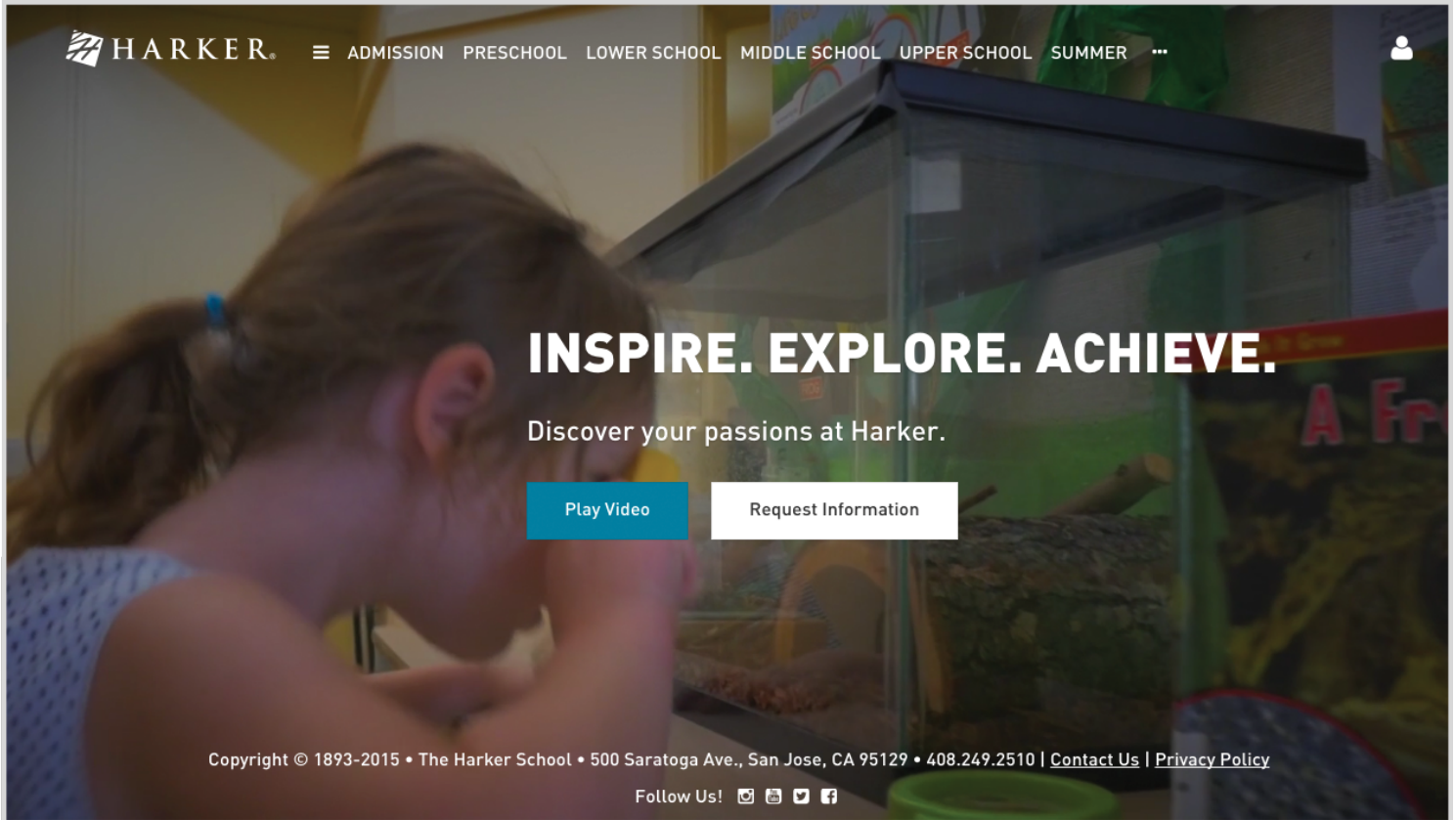
## Interactive Elements

Using scrolling, rollovers and hover effects, interactive elements create richer user experiences with the intent to surprise. Faster Internet connections and new advances in coding language makes these lightweight CSS animations, without slowing page load times.

## Noteworthy Examples

[The Episcopal School of Dallas](#)  
[Gilman School](#)  
[The York School](#)  
[Williams School](#)

*Pro tip: Save interactive elements to link to the pages or videos you most want your website visitor to see.*



## Hero Videos

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a video is worth a million. With online competition growing steeper — and prospective families' attention spans growing shorter — you need to figure out how to say more, with less. Auto-play video headers are just the trick.

Auto-play video headers showcase campus life through a series of muted, brief video snippets, replacing the traditional photo slideshow. Located front and center on the homepage, your site visitors won't have to click, scroll, or search to connect with campus life — improving site experience and increasing engagement, and conversions.

## Noteworthy Examples

[The Harker School](#)

[Wilbraham & Monson Academy](#)

[Woodward Academy](#)



# Create Your Own Video Header: Pro Tips

## PRO TIP 1 Plan ahead.

Before you get started filming anything, make a list of events you think will best capture your school's culture. You can't stage a football team's win or students volunteering at a Habitat for Humanity event — so be sure to include the dates of the events you would like to attend, and prioritize them. Chances are you'll need to plan your video almost an entire school year in advance to capture the true essence of campus life. Don't have that long? At least try to span it over a few months.

## PRO TIP 2 Be diverse.

Include different aspects of academics, athletics, student life, and campus life in your filming process. And, film each segment from both close up and far away if possible. While you're not going to use everything you film, when it comes to editing, you'll be happy you have a wide variety to choose from. You can never have enough footage.

## PRO TIP 3 Take site visitors on a rollercoaster.

Mix up your exciting video content — like cheering fans — with content that moves at a slower pace, like a beautiful wide shot of your campus. That way, you can share a diverse series of moments, without campus life seeming like summer camp or solely studying.

## PRO TIP 4 Keep it short and sweet.

To keep site visitors' attention, each clip in your video *should not last more than 2-3 seconds*, and your video in its entirety should not exceed one minute. The purpose of this video is to keep your audience wanting more, not to bore them.

## PRO TIP 5 Make your videos browser-friendly.

In order for your video to display properly in every browser, you'll need to export your video in the following three formats: .mp4, .webM, and .ogg. Luckily there's Miro Video Converter — a free tool that allows you to convert and export your video file into each of these formats.





# SECTION TWO

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# PREPARING FOR YOUR REDESIGN

# Building a Budget

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Before you dive into anything, you need to take the time to assess your budget, and what you can do with it.

# What Goes Into Building A Budget?

As exciting as it may be to think about all of the possibilities with creating a new website and taking advantage of all the latest trends and technology out there, you are no doubt asking yourself the most important question: What's it going to cost? And that's a good question!

Smaller schools with limited resources and larger schools alike all need to be sensitive to how best to use the budgets they're given. Fortunately there are a variety of ways to maximize what you have. There are four "buckets" we usually refer to when building a budget with a school: 1) Design Scope, 2) Functionality, 3) Assets and 4) Content.



## 1

## Design Scope

Ultimately, the cost of a beautiful design is a function of time: creative direction, front-end development, project management and training. The aesthetic of the homepage doesn't necessarily translate to an "expensive" site.

Sites where the design is deep — meaning we are investing creative time on specific landing pages — can expand the scope, as can "special treatments" such as an interactive campus tour or a sophisticated social media mash-up page.

There is an endless supply of "eye candy" out there — animation, docks, panels and the like — that we have all come to use and expect with websites; we are happy to develop and deploy some of those for every site, too. *It's just a matter of when to say when.*

## 2

## Functionality

Very often, schools plan for the "one-time" cost of designing and setting up the site, but the annual subscription cost can come as a surprise.

We believe that success comes from not just a great new site, but from ongoing support, training and counting on a platform that evolves with the times.

Find a software that is modular enough to allow for small schools to find a solution that fits, as well as large schools who have higher demands.

It's easy to spend months on a website, so identifying the most important areas of the new site will help you to delegate where you'll spend, and where you're willing to pull in the reins.



## 3

## Assets

Great video and photography make all the difference, so many schools will plan for photography and video in the new site, and will rely on contractors to do this work. This is a perfectly good way to approach building a library. However, just as many schools leverage staff, faculty and even students to help them pull together imagery that captures their school. Sometimes a combination of the two works best.



Hawaii Preparatory Academy



Loomis Chaffee



St. Mary's Episcopal School

## 4

## Content

A great website has succinct and compelling copy, which takes time and skill. If have someone who can do this in-house (and has time!), you are in good shape. Some schools will outsource a portion of the writing to expedite the process or to get a fresh voice.

*You may have been hoping there would be hard figures on this page. We are reluctant to predispose you to one because there are so many ways to approach it. Finalsite has worked with schools who have small budgets and large budgets, and we think that taking a unique approach to each individual school is the key of any successful website. On the next page you'll see an example of what our Build Your Solution form looks like.*

# Build Your Solution

*An example of a solution-builder from the Finalsite Platform.*

## Platform

- ☐ CMS
- ☐ LMS
- ☐ Online Admissions Software

## Add-Ons

- ☐ Alerts
- ☐ Athletics Manager
- ☐ Blogs & Forums
- ☐ Calendar Manager
- ☐ Commerce Manager
- ☐ eNotify
- ☐ Faculty & Staff Directory
- ☐ Forms Manager
- ☐ Multimedia Manager
- ☐ News Manager
- ☐ Registration Manager

## Data and Integration

- ☐ SIS Integration  
SIS System: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ SSO
- ☐ LDAP/Active Directory
- ☐ Finalsite Open API

## Services

- ☐ Responsive Design
- ☐ Strategic Consulting
- ☐ Search Engine Optimization
- ☐ Pay-Per-Click (PPC)  
Campaign Management

## Community Portals

- ☐ Admissions
- ☐ Alumni
- ☐ Board of Trustees  
& Friends
- ☐ Faculty & Staff
- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Group Spaces
- ☐ Private Social Networking

## Mobile

- ☐ Mobile Site
- ☐ iPad/iPhone App

## Analytics

- ☐ Finalsite Dashboard
- ☐ Data-Driven Site Audit

# Getting Website Buy-In

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Of course you want to get everything you want and more for your new website. And while going responsive may seem like a no-brainer to you, sometimes your Board isn't so convinced.

Here are suggested strategies and case studies on getting buy-in.

# Tips for Getting Buy-In

## Conduct a competitive analysis.

Completely research the competition. Who is their website provider? Is their website responsive? Do they have a video? How do you rank in comparison in search engine results? Having a thorough understanding of what their websites look like will give you some firepower for proving your school's website needs an update.

For example, if your top two competitors have responsive websites, and your school still has a fixed-width site, you're bound to lose some traffic. Why? It's (a) harder for searchers to find you because your website appears basically nonexistent to smartphone and tablet users and (b) it doesn't offer as engaging of an experience as a responsive design.

## Propose your own budget.

The key to success is confidence. Before stepping into your meeting to propose your web solution, you should have an itemized list of costs for everything you'd like to include in your new website, from hiring a photographer to going responsive. Showing how much everything costs in total will ensure there are no surprises for anyone if and when approved.

## Come prepared to combat suggestions.

Your board members and business managers eat, sleep and dream dollar signs, so when your proposed redesign is out of the budget, they're going to ask "isn't there some way you can do this cheaper?" or "isn't there a free solution?"

Before you let out a sigh of disappointment and retreat, there are numerous points of comparison, or value propositions, to share with your decision makers to prove the investment is worthwhile.

### *Make a trade off.*

*"If I had to sacrifice part of my advertising budget to get this [a responsive website], I would do it. Really, if I had to make a trade off within my budget I would do it. Our website is our main, and most important, marketing tool."*

Kriss Hayward  
Public Relations Director  
The Kings Academy

# “How I got the Buy-In” | Stories from Our Clients

## “Everyone just knew.”

*“When you see what your website looks like compared to responsive designs, it makes your website look so much less impactful. We’re in the heart of Silicon Valley, and we need to be reflecting the latest technology. I didn’t need to give a lot of data about mobile users. When I shared what our website could look like on a mobile device or iPad, and, what our site currently looks like — **everyone just knew.**”*

-Kriss Hayward, Public Relations Director at The Kings Academy

## “I asked the principal.”

*“I asked the principal if he wanted to try the LMS in a few of our classrooms. But, **he was so excited** and wanted to do it completely across the board for all our classes.”*

-Janice Cuellar, Director of Web Communications at Bishop McNamara High School

## “We studied our website traffic.”

*“We went 1:1 with our 4th through 12th grade students, and devices were different screen sizes ranging from an iPad mini to a full laptop. We also studied the traffic to our website and saw that **many of our visitors were mobile.** Our faculty and students use Finalsight on a daily basis, and we wanted them to have the optimal experience on each device and the responsive design achieved our goal beautifully.”*

-Jason Kern, Director of Technology at Oakridge School



# Selecting a Vendor

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Picking the right person for the job isn't easy. We like to use the term "person" instead of "company" or "software," because we believe that the website redesign experience should be about teamwork.

# The 3-Step Selection Process

With so many choices ranging from large e-commerce site providers to small web design shops, the options are endless and the process of selection can be challenging.

**Make it simpler with three steps to ensure you'll be happy with the vendor you choose.**

First, do your research.

Using Pinterest or another bookmarking tool like Evernote, start keeping track of sites you like, and be specific about what you like about them. Start by looking at school sites you enjoy (especially those of your competitors), and be sure to bookmark a few non-school sites, too. Then determine whose work you like best. Does one vendor feature many parallax sites, while another seems to focus on splash pages? Take note of whose work reflects what you're looking for, and make a short list.



Second, interview vendors.

It can be easy to be roped in by a gimmicky sales website or splashy portfolios, so a thoughtful interview can be the best way to get the facts on vendors to best make your decision. Get your questions ready in advance and take good notes.

Third, call references.

Speaking with schools like yours who have been down a similar path is crucial to seeing if a vendor is right for the job. And, while references tend to be the happiest customers, they'll likely be honest with you, so don't hesitate to call and ask tough questions.

By this point in your selection process you probably have a frontrunner, but be sure to loop in a few colleagues to help you make your final decision. Not only will their opinion help you sway other decision makers, but fresh eyes and input can only help solidify your selection.

# Vendor Fulfillment and Considerations

Shop the competition and the industry. Take the time to look at sites you like, don't like, and ask yourself "why?" This will give you a good gauge as to what you're looking for in a design and make it easier to communicate your ideas to your designer.

**What is the purpose of your redesign?** What is the main reason your school's website needs a redesign? Do you need to go responsive? Did you recently go through a rebrand? Is it your school's anniversary? Are you trying to compete with the school down the street? Do you want to implement an online learning platform?

**What is your budget?** Think about how you want to spend your allocated money by determining what is most important to your school and its future, and what you'll need to get there. That way, you'll be able to hone in on website examples that meet those needs, rather than just saying "I like this one."

**What exactly do you want?** Look over websites to determine the kind of fonts you like, what navigations appeal to you, whether you like full-width photos or not — the list goes on and on. Simply compiling a list of websites in a word document without any notes will leave you and your designer feeling confused about a solid starting point.

*Choose a partner who stays up-to-date with industry trends and changes to keep your school's site one step ahead.*

**What do you like?** When you start compiling a list of websites you like, make sure to write comments like "I like how this navigation includes photos," and "I'd really like to embed an infographic like this on my homepage." Then, review all your notes with your web team before you get started to ensure everyone is on the same page.

**What's in store for the future?** Take a quick time machine to the future: Is the vendor you're selecting a trusted ally that will keep up with industry standards? Clichés and trends aren't necessarily strategies or best practices. Focusing on recreating content another school has done in the past that you liked may not be relevant by the time your website launches.

# Planning and Strategy\_\_\_\_\_

First things first.

Redesigning is about more than just your website. When you redesign, it goes far beyond just a new look and feel. An effective redesign is prefaced by planning, strategy and content creation.



# Pre-Redesign Considerations

**1** Forming a web team.  
Establish a web team. You'll need about 3-4 people who can plan, organize, manage, train, and make final decisions along the way.

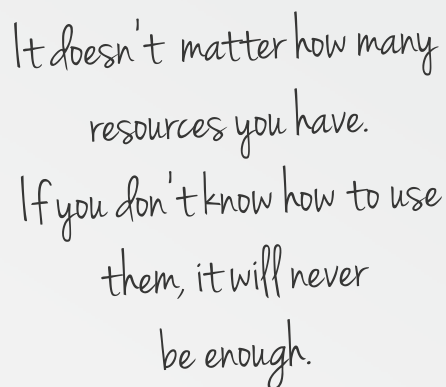
**2** Conduct a S.W.O.T. analysis.  
Identify your school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to determine which content takes precedence on your site, and where you need help.

**3** Define the purpose of your website.  
Whether it's admissions or communications, your goal will help make decisions about content and design during deployment.

**4** Set a timeline.  
Set a "publish date" you wish to meet, and then establish weekly check-in meetings with your web team to stay on track and talk through any issues or potential roadblocks.

**5** Content evaluation.  
Begin examining your content early. Remove out-dated content; re-write content to be more web-friendly; and write new content for information you feel is missing. And even after you've launched, revisit your content often to make sure that the information you publish is helping you reach the original purpose of the site. Establish a schedule for reviewing your site to determine if any changes need to be made, and who is responsible for making them.

**6** Defining Your School's Story.  
How will you go about sharing your school's story online? What is your school's story? Identify the intricacies of your campus to better set yourself apart from the competition.



It doesn't matter how many  
resources you have.  
If you don't know how to use  
them, it will never  
be enough.

# 1

## Forming a Web Team: FAQs

What is a web team?

A web team is a group of 3-4 individuals who will work together to plan, organize, and manage your website. Working alone or getting too many people involved can prolong the redesign process. A web team means you can share time and responsibilities with colleagues to lessen the workload, meet deadlines and meet the needs of other departments.

Who should be on my web team?

In general, your web team should have someone from communications, technology and advancement. Besides a marketing team member, you can also bring together members of other departments that may not typically work together — like technology and advancement. That way, everyone's needs are addressed and met.

### Client Story

CCSD181's web team consists of a webmaster, director of technology, a graphic designer and the director of communications.

*"Our job descriptions made for a natural group to come together, but our individual skill sets have also proven to be an ideal mix."*

Bridget McGuiggan  
Director of Communications  
Community Consolidated School District 181

What Should Team Members Do?

Divide and conquer. Web teams bring together the niche skills of individuals at your school to get work done more effectively and efficiently. Providing web team members with designated tasks will create a workflow that saves time and gets work done without overlapping one another. For example the web team at Saint Mary's Hall in Texas creates a timeline of projects to improve their website, and designates tasks on that timeline to team members.

How often should we meet during the redesign?

During the redesign, your team should plan to meet on a weekly basis. If you don't have time to meet, ask the team to send a weekly update email about what they've been working on, what they hope to accomplish in the next week, as well as any hurdles.

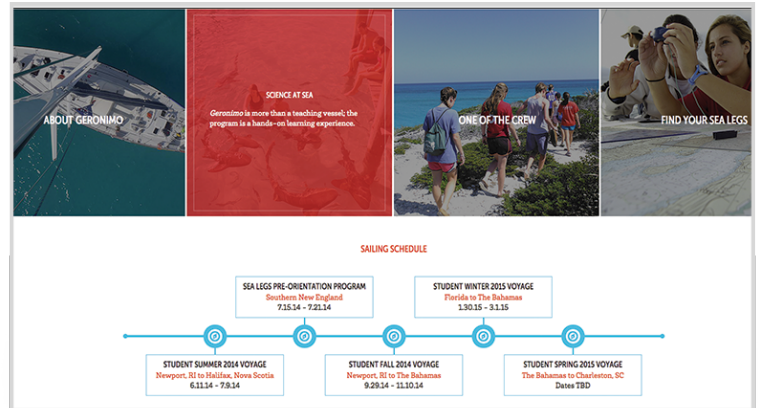
## 2

# Conducting a S.W.O.T Analysis

Besides presenting your board with hard evidence and facts about responsive design and what your competition is up to, providing a S.W.O.T. — strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats — analysis will prove you've done a complete analysis of you website, your school, and the marketplace.

## Defining Strengths.

Start with the story of what sets you apart. What advantages do you have over other schools? What do you do better than anyone else? Do you offer a 1:1 program? What about study abroad opportunities? Are there well-known faculty on staff? What kind of programs do you offer that no other schools do?



*Use your strengths as a main focal point of your design.*

## Defining Opportunities.

Think about trends—and not just in education—but everywhere. Consider how social media has changed the way you tell your school's story online, or how responsive design has changed the way constituents interact with your site. Grab the opportunities to shine in these new spaces, and you'll turn an opportunity into a strength. Good news — **opportunities are everywhere.**

## Defining Threats and Weaknesses.

No one wants to talk about what can hurt us, but being aware of your weaknesses and threats can help to build website content to combat them.

Think about:

- What can you improve?
- What should you avoid?
- What do people see as your weaknesses?
- What factors lose students or faculty?
- What are your competitors doing?

# 3

## Goal Setting

### Define a purpose: Marketing Vs. Communications

Your website needs to have a purpose. It is the cornerstone of the site's structure, design and content. Think of your website's purpose as a roadmap: without it, you and your website visitors will commonly find yourself lost, with no sense of direction, taking guesses as to which way is correct, losing valuable time and resources along the way.

*Ask yourself this: Will our website be geared towards marketing to prospective families, or providing constituents with information they need to know?*

### Marketing Centric vs. Communications Centric

Schools who use their website for marketing still provide the latest news and upcoming events on their website, but provide all other information and resources to constituents elsewhere. Keeping these kind of communications separate from the main website offers two main advantages: **enhanced privacy and organization.**

If you choose to use your website as your central communications tool, your main goal is to please constituents, rather than to appeal to prospects. This is common among schools districts with a large amount of constituents who need instant communications. **The most common obstacle with these websites is their tendency to be cluttered.**

Your website shouldn't be a content hub: it should be the core of your marketing strategy.



# Goal Analysis Questionnaire

*Planning the purpose of your website requires more than flipping a coin. Answer these questions to open a discussion about what the purpose of your website should be.*

## QUESTION 1

Who is our target audience?

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## QUESTION 2

What is our goal?

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## QUESTION 3

How many of our paper forms would we like to be made available online? Which ones?

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## QUESTION 4

Should those paper forms be private, or is it OK to share them publically?

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## QUESTION 5

Do we have the resources to produce marketing content? Who will create content?

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## QUESTION 6

What resources do we have to keep our website looking new?

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# 4

## Setting a Timeline

Think Strategy First.

There's something about the phrase "we need to launch in less than a month," that makes us weary. Sure, wanting a brand spankin' new website just in time for a new school year seems like a great idea — but great, quality websites don't just appear overnight. They require planning, strategy, and the collaboration of creative minds from all departments and even constituents.

Every school is different. Timelines will differ based on budget, workload, tiers of approval, and then of course, there's the occasional discrepancy where someone on your team quits, or the new head of school is taking *forever* to approve the homepage.

*Regardless, we believe that 3-4 months is the perfect amount of time to design a site, train your team, and deploy effectively. Anything less or more can compromise the quality of your design or even affect your budget.*

*On the next page, you'll see an example of what our own deployment process looks like. Many pre-redesign considerations come before what we call the "Discovery Phase."*



# Don't Make This Redesign Mistake: Getting Hung Up on a Launch Date

You want to know what's stressful? Redesigning a website solo. What's even more stressful? Setting the expectation that your website is going to launch by August 1st — and it doesn't.

Things happen: content takes longer-than-expected to approve; your professional photo shoot day was a total wash-out; your co-worker who was writing all your content quit; your board is hung-up on one font and can't make a decision.

*Sigh.*

The momentous stress of not completing your website by the launch date can be a dark cloud looming over your productivity and motivation. And being fixated on a launch date that was set before the project began can be like setting yourself up for disappointment.

To launch a website successfully, be sure to focus on the quality of the website, rather than launching by a hard-set date. If it isn't ready, then it isn't ready. Don't launch a website until the point when you're satisfied with how it looks, even if that's two months later than expected.

The King's Academy's new website was supposed to launch within 6 months. With a start date in February and a planned launch date of August 1st, Kriss Hayward, The King's Academy's Public Relations Director, planned to have the website ready to go for the beginning of the school year.

However, it didn't launch until October 15th.

"The reason it took longer was my fault," said Kriss. "I have all these other responsibilities, and I couldn't move the project along as quickly as I wanted. My goal of August 1st was unrealistic."



# What Our Process Looks Like

## Discover

We don't want our first interaction to feel as awkward as a blind date. Before we start designing, let's talk about you. We take the time to learn about what really makes your school unique through a discovery and surveying process to give us the jumping off point for your site.



1



2

## Training

Every step of the way, you'll be learning the Finals site software and best practices to ensure you'll hit the ground running after launch. With a Finals site Project Manager to guide you and online help at your fingertips, you'll be on your way to expert status in no time.

## Design

Dream big. Our award-winning designers can create it, and make it work towards your goals. From the latest web trends to strategies geared towards a mobile future, our award-winning designers will craft a site that reflects your school on the screen.

3



4

## Review

Our nit-picky team of perfectionists won't let your site go live without a thorough review process. Your Project Manager, Designer and Coder, will review every last pixel to ensure it is just as it should be through a site rendering process designed to ensure full functionality across supported browsers.



4

## Launch

The big day is here! And because we've crossed our Ts at every stage, there are no worries about making the big switch. Now it's time to sit back, relax, and bask in all the praise you're receiving for creating such a fantastic website for your school. Bravo to you! across supported browsers.





# What Happens Pre-Discovery?

Most schools don't realize the amount of work that needs to be done before they even come to us. Market research, re-branding and content strategy all play a major role in ensuring you launch a website that meets the needs and expectations of your audience in less time.

Before beginning your project, you should have the following completed and prepared:

**1) A list of the website pages you will be migrating.**

Even content that you choose to keep should be re-evaluated — especially those more than one year old.

**2) A list of the website pages you will delete.**

It's okay to say good-bye to content! Clean slates aren't a bad thing.

**3) A list of new pages that need to be developed, and who will be writing them.**

What would make a great addition to your site, and who can help? Too often schools leave writing new content until the last minute, but it's hard to see how your design can come together without the correct content in place.

**4) At least five photos you'd like to use on your website.**

The quality of your photos has the potential to make or break the way your design comes together. Unless you have a professional camera, or a readily available photographer, taking professional, high-quality photos before you head into the redesign process can make your life easier. That way, you'll see your entire design come together at once, rather than adding in the photos you like most at the end.

**5) All logos, slogans and colors finalized.**

Want to speed up the approval process? Before you head into the redesign process have your marketing team, board and head of school sign off on approved colors, logos and slogans you plan on using. That way, you've already gotten one necessary seal of approval you need to keep moving, so you won't hold up the design process.

# 5

## Content Evaluation

Evaluating what you already have on your website will give you an idea of the work that lies ahead of you. Conduct your content evaluation using these six questions and two tests.

### 1 How old is this content?

Content that's more than one year old — with the exception of your school's mission statement and other evergreen content — is subject to evaluation.

### 2 How relevant is this content?

With users' attention spans getting shorter, the content that's on your site should be crafted to engage your different audiences. Your content should be timely and interesting. Ask yourself "would I enjoy reading this?"

### 3 What is the voice of this content?

Did you let numerous faculty members write their own pages? While divvying up the work seems like a good idea to lighten your workload, over the years it can produce a variety of voices, tones, and messaging.

### 4 How is your content organized?

Paragraphs, drop-downs, lists, photos: they all serve a niche of email content. Organize your content in a way where it makes sense. For example, sharing a list of clubs available at your school alongside photos works better than text-heavy paragraphs.

### 5 Is the content mobile-optimized?

Going responsive isn't just about having a website design that looks great on mobile. Your goal should be to make a maximum impact with a minimum amount of words. Short headlines (about 60-75 characters) and a minimal amount of text will win you mobile conversions.

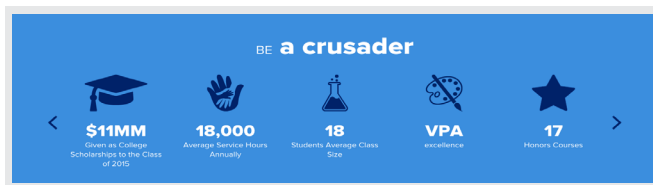
## 6 What kind of content should we get rid of?

Old content; long, wordy paragraphs; pixelated photos; entire pages that no longer serve a purpose: it's about time they all get canned. Purging content is the first thing you should do after you evaluate your website in its totality.

While you're evaluating, make a list of all the site pages or content you'd like to remove, why, and if you intend to replace it with something else. And while it may be hard to part with content you've worked hard on, you'll feel better once you hit "delete."

## 7 What kind of content should replace it with?

Don't just write new content; create new ways to share your content. Once you've made a list of the pages that need to be created or completely re-worked, you can then consider the optimal way to share that content.



Opt for infographics to share fast facts, and videos to share your schools core messaging. Drop-down lists make it easy to provide lots of new content without cluttering pages.

### Try These Two Content Evaluation Tests

Copy and paste all your content into a Word document and see what it really looks like. You'd be amazed how many "pages" a single page on your website takes up. It can be an awakening for long-winded writers.

The average site visitor spends three minutes on your site. Take three minutes and look at your site, and your competitor's website. See who you can learn more about in the short period of time.

# Tips for Writing Better Content

## 1. Write Content With a Purpose

Whether you need to start with a completely fresh slate, or plan on re-vamping what you have, it's essential to go through each parent page and sub page on your website and write content that tells your school's story. Make it brief, to the point, conversational and enjoyable. To get started on writing content, read our blog on writing content that converts.

## 2. Create or Use Images That Reflect Your Text

You want to know what doesn't make sense? Placing an image of books or an empty library in your "Academics" subpages and parent pages. Take the time each year to go into classrooms and photograph students working in groups and teachers inspiring conversations. The same is true for campus and athletic events.

Visual content is not just photographs. Lots of schools use infographics and call-to-action buttons throughout their website. Update your infographics to ensure they have the most up-to-date facts, and re-do your call-to-action buttons to match the text and colors of your new site.

*Pro Tip: Recruiting a student or other faculty member with an interest in graphic design can improve the look and feel of your website pages exponentially.*

## 3. Format Your Content and Images to Make it Flow

Pictures and images should work together — not compete with one another for attention. Whether you want to use drop down menus to organize FAQs, an infographic to provide some fast facts, or create a history timeline, your images and text should flow effortlessly within your design.

Formatting your content is equally as essential as writing the content itself. It needs to be organized in a hierarchy and provide enough white space so it's easy to read — you cannot just copy and paste text, upload a photo and hit "Publish." When you write your content, plan on using headers and sub headers to organize your text, and use photos when they build upon what you've written. (However, keep in mind that visual content is processed and retained much better than text content!)



# Choosing the Perfect Photos for Your Website

## Quality

The photos used in the design of your school's website should be high quality. Photos centric to your school's web design should be staged, taken by a professional or captured by your designated in-house photographer.

## Content

Avoid creating slideshows of photos that make your school look like a summer camp or four walls and a roof.

*Variety is key.* Your school's experience — from academics to architecture — should have an equal presence on your homepage. And remember, seeing people will always evoke more emotion than seeing places.

## Character

Ninety-four percent of first impressions are based on the way your site looks, rather than the information it provides — so take that into consideration as you choose each photo that lives in your web design. What makes you unique should be the first thing users see when they land on your site — because anyone can show a close up of a smiling student.

## Image Size

Do you envision your photos spanning the height and width of your homepage, or do they belong in a slideshow? Before you decide which photos you want on your website, determine whether they will fit the look and feel of your website.

## Color

Choose photos that maintain your school's brand and color palette to create cohesive design. Using photos that appear as though they are part of one design rather than a separate entity provides a more impressive experience and can make your homepage pop. Don't mix in black and white photos with color photos, and stray from anything overwhelming.

## Location

While pixelated iPhone photos don't belong on a homepage, they do still have a home on your site. Use Flickr, SmugMug and Instagram accounts to house your "candid" photos taken by students and faculty, and share the photos with a branded hashtag, like #CougarMoments, and have them stream right to a social media mash up page. *Because really, how else can you share that awesome selfie from the championship basketball game?*

# 5

## Defining Your Story

When it comes down to it, your school's story isn't a mission statement, a comparison to your competitor or a list of accomplishments. It's the details, the little pieces, the intricacies that come together and make your community whole. What led to the championship game? How did your traditions start? Who's the driving force behind the girls in your STEM program? Know these, and you can tell your school's story.

The following questions can help you to define your school's story.

- 1 What makes our school unique?
- 2 What do we offer that no one else does?
- 3 What are our latest accomplishments?
- 4 If I asked a student/parent/teacher what they love most about our school, what would it be?
- 5 What makes us better than the competition?
- 6 What is a typical student's day like? What makes that special?
- 7 What are your traditions? Pinpoint the secrets of your school.

# Implementing Your Strategy

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With your content in order, it's time to put your best face forward: implementing text and media content to create an engaging journey for website visitors.

# Homepage Real Estate: What Belongs Here?

When a website gets a redesign, or there's a plan to re-vamp the homepage content, every person from every department comes in ready to fight to earn their spot on the homepage. And from what we've heard, it can be pretty intense. From coaches and teachers to directors of advancement and heads of school, everyone has something they want to see front and center.

Let's be real: not every piece of content is really homepage worthy. But having your co-workers — and maybe even your co-worker-friends — swarm your office with favors and ideas can be stressful.

On the following page you will find a few guidelines for choosing the right content that will be the most beneficial to your school and website visitors.

## It serves a purpose for marketing.

There's major disconnect between departments when it comes to defining the purpose of your homepage. Will it be used to market to prospective families, or share information with current families? Any content that doesn't add to your school's value proposition, brand or mission, it can surely go on a lower level page, or in a portal.

## It can make your school money in some way.

Summer programs, annual fund pushes, and obviously an online application all deserve a place in the spotlight because they bring in funds your school depends on.

## It's visually appealing.

First impressions are 94% design-related. Content that enhances that design and first impression are essential to the success of your website. However, if the content that someone wishes to publish on the homepage doesn't add value (or completely clashes with the design and layout) it's okay to say "no."

## It corresponds to what website visitors expect to see.

When a website visitor lands on your homepage, they expect to see certain content like photos of your school community, recent news events, links to apply online, so it's easy for them to navigate to their next step. However, when your homepage is cluttered with content they didn't expect to see there, like a lunch menu or summer reading list, it's easy to become confused and be ready to leave — ultimately leaving you with some high bounce rates, and that's the last thing you want!

## It shakes things up.

Certain pieces of the content on your homepage should be crafted to be dynamic. Incorporating news sections, or featuring an "In the Spotlight" section will give you a place to always put new content. That way, during peak website traffic time, you can be sure that there's always something new displaying on your homepage.



# Don't Make This Redesign Mistake: Spending Too Much Time on Homepage Design

Sure, your homepage is a beautiful "front door" for website visitors to enter through. But if someone rings the doorbell and no one answers, they're going to leave.

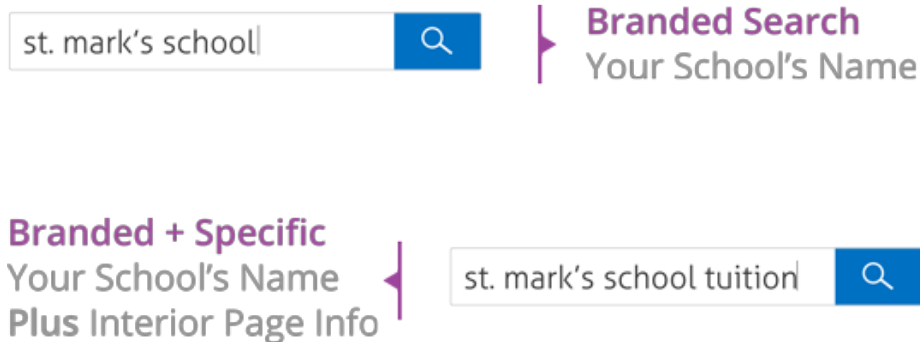
A homepage design is only one piece of a very big, complex puzzle and it's important to put an equal amount of effort and focus on your lower level and landing pages as your homepage — as they contain all the information your users come looking for.

## Don't let users enter through your mudroom.

Just like a mudroom, messy and disorganized lower level pages can be a turn off to website visitors. Be sure to consider content hierarchy, photos, left and right banners, lower level navigation, and calls to action when designing your lower level pages.

# Lower Level Page and Landing Page Design

Interior page design is equally as important as your homepage design. Think of it this way: how often do you think people search for just your school name? More than often enough, they're searching for something specific about your school, such as tuition or athletics.



Landing pages are the main pages, other than your homepage, that you'd expect website visitors to land on from Search, social, or your main navigation. For most schools, typical landing pages are Athletics, Admissions, Giving, Arts, Academics, School Life, etc. Lower level pages are the pages that fall under a landing page in your site hierarchy.

**For example, a landing page is Admissions. A lower level page is Tuition and Financial Aid.**

Maintaining consistency among your landing pages, and then again among your lower-level pages increases organization, the user experience, and maintains a consistent look and feel, which is crucial for branding.

Each lower level page on your site should get an equal amount of attention to ensure three main things:

1. They're formatted in a textual hierarchy that makes information easy to find.
2. They have proper branding, and high quality photographs.
3. They ask users to take another step to continue exploring your site using a call to action button.

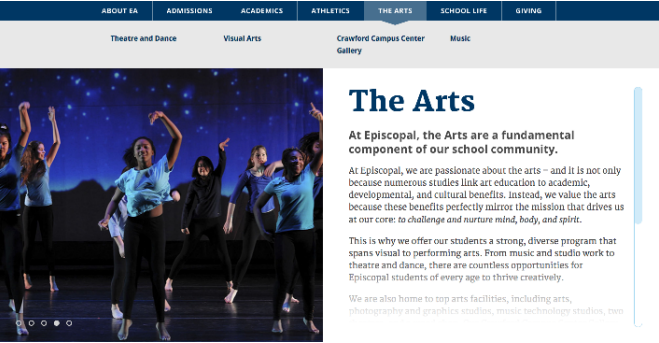
# Examples of Interior Page Designs



Landing Page



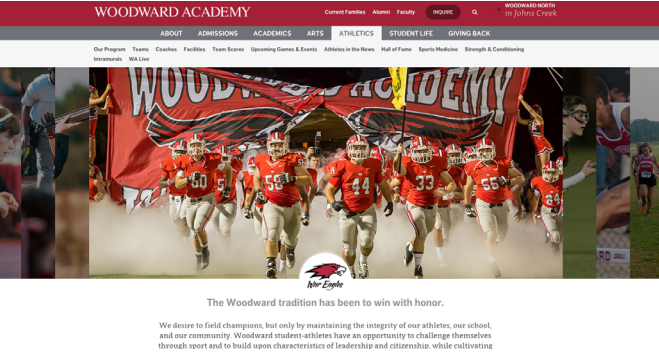
Lower Level Page



Landing Page



Lower Level Page



Landing Page



Lower Level Page



## SECTION THREE

# LAUNCHING YOUR WEBSITE

# Time for Launch

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Ah, deployment: the long-awaited culmination of all your hard work. You have triple-checked every last comma and link and you have your champagne ready to celebrate.

So...now what?

In this section, we'll cover what tasks run parallel to website deployment.



# First Steps for Deployment

## Have a Soft Launch

Even once the website launches, still keep it a surprise until you are 100% confident it is ready. While we'd like to believe that the "Publish" button works magic, chances are there will be kinks — so don't count your chickens before they hatch.

Kriss Hayward at The King's Academy launched their new website in the morning, spent the day cleaning up content and links, and didn't announce the site launch until 6:30 in the evening — nearly 12 hours after the site was published. Similarly, Renbrook School in West Hartford, CT launched while everyone was on spring break — just in case!

## Make an Announcement

Before you get back to the boring calendar updates, it's time to bask in your glory and praise. Send an email to your community; post on social with a related hashtag that encourages families to share their thoughts; or hey — shout it from the top of roof on the first day of class — whatever works for you.

## Train Your Administrators, Faculty, Parents and Students

Nothing is worse than handing your community a new tool and not detailing how to use it and how they can benefit from it. Once you launch, provide community members with details on how to access the information they need. For admins, you'll need to provide training on how to edit website pages, meet branding requirements and/or submit them for approval.

# Other Considerations

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What else goes along with a brand new website? In this section we'll cover some other website-related assets and enhancements that go hand-in-hand with a website redesign.

# Search Engine Marketing

It's important to make sure your new website gets found in search, too.

Launching a new website doesn't guarantee improved website traffic. As a matter of fact, you're bound to see a drop in website traffic for a few days post-launch as Google re-crawls your new website pages.

While focusing on SEO (Search Engine Optimization) can greatly improve your ranking in search, PPC (Pay-Per-Click) and re-marketing campaigns improve the likelihood that qualified traffic are reaching the exact pages you want them to.

For example, if someone were to Google "best independent schools in Boston," SEO would help you appear on page one. PPC would ensure they land on the page you want them to, besides your homepage.



# Implementing SEO and PPC

## What's the Difference?

### Search Engine Optimization

Because the search engines don't publish a playbook for ranking well in organic search, Search Engine Optimization is the art and science of making it clear to the search engines that you are a good resource for people doing the searches you care about.

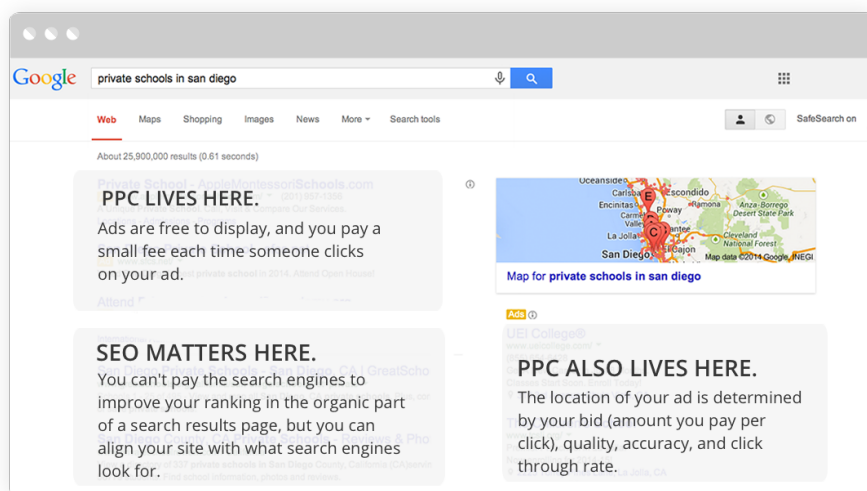
The search engines are constantly updating their algorithms to reward high-quality sites that will satisfy the searcher's intent and to punish those sites that are trying to "game" the system. Therefore, it's important to focus on SEO strategies that are consistent with great user experience and authentic representation of what it is that you do.

### Pay-Per-Click Advertising

Online advertising (AKA Pay-Per-Click, or PPC) takes many forms, but we believe that the foundation of a good PPC campaign for schools is laid in the text advertising space on search engine results pages. These ads give you a high level of control over who sees your ads, what they see in the ad and on your site after they click, and what you spend to make all of this happen.

## Do I need both when I deploy my site?

Because most redesigns involve a hard look at website content, it's the perfect time to undertake SEO work. Understanding the search behavior of your desired search audience shows you where content needs to be added or bolstered in order to help the search engines make the match and land you on Page 1. On the other hand, PPC campaigns are more independent of the site itself and can be set up at any time without much difference in work or strategy.



# What to Look For in a Partner for SEO and PPC

## 1 Do they have other education clients?

You're not selling pizzas or personal injury services. Look for a partner who has expertise in the industry to help define important trends and keywords.

## 2 Do they charge you a percentage of your ad spend?

You'll find this disincentives you from increasing your spend when you want to expand your advertising efforts and disincentives them from focusing on you when you have to pull back.

## 3 Do they take the time to understand your specific goals?

Or, do they try to tell you what your goals are? Choosing a partner who understands that your school has a unique audience and budget is crucial to success.

## 4 Are they responsive to your needs for clarity and adjustment?

Your partner should be willing to translate the technobabble and adapt to your changing priorities.



# Data Integration

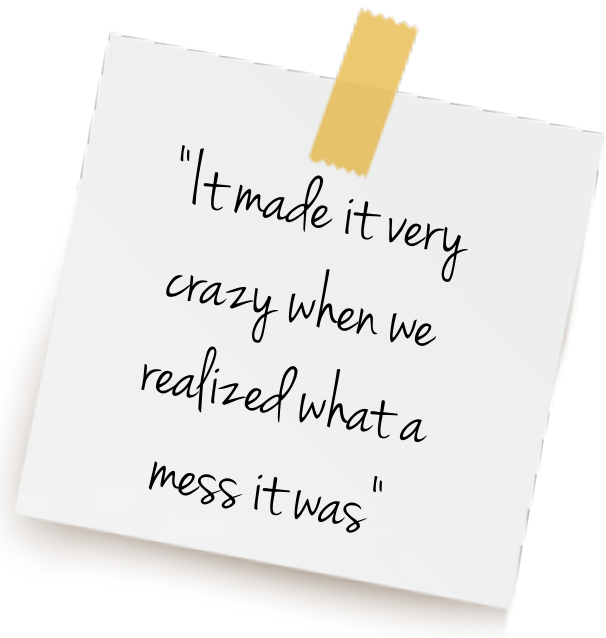
When you redesign, it's not just about looking great on the front-end, but also performing well on the back-end.

Integrating your Student Information System (SIS) and other academic apps with your website means that you won't waste valuable time entering duplicate information or switching from platform to platform trying to figure out which information is correct or incorrect.

## Why Integrate? A Case Study from Far Hills Country Day School

"At the end of the school year the data on the website was totally different than what was in our SIS," said Tye Campbell, Director of Technology.

The root of this mess was the inability to update both their SIS and website platform simultaneously. "People make schedule changes and move around," said Tye, "and it was hard to update in two places."



Different staff members were updating different data in the SIS and on the website platform. With numerous individuals contributing changes in more than one location, there was no master system. "It made it very crazy when we realized what a mess it was, and we were always wondering which was the accurate system," he said.

Tye made the choice to integrate Far Hills Country Day School's with their SIS. The result? An improved experience for website users and admins alike.

"We now put a lot of emphasis on the fact that what you're doing here with the data means something," said Tye, "and we are in far better shape than we were before."



# SECTION FOUR

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# POST-DEPLOYMENT

# Tips for Improvement

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A successful post-deployment heavily relies on the tools you use for constant improvement.

In this section we'll cover some of the tools that help you analyze and improve website performance — until your next redesign, of course!

# Tools for Analytics

Launching a website without analytics is like heading on a cross country trip without a roadmap. Take the time to set up a Google Analytics account (we do that for all our clients at Finals!e!) and keep an eye on website performace.

Key metrics to keep an eye on include:

**Bounce Rate:** This metric is the percentage of visitors who come to your website and then navigate away after only visiting one page.

**Top exit pages:** Unlike a “bounce”, when a user visits your site and barely views one page, an “exit” is when a user visits multiple pages and then leaves your site.

**Top entrance points:** These are the most popular ways people are entering through your site. For independent schools, other than the homepage, top entrance points include admissions, employment, summer programs, and athletics.

**Traffic Sources:** Monitor how people are getting to your site can also help you determine which of your campaigns are bringing in the most traffic.

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There are three different types of traffic sources.

**Direct Visitors:** Users that visit your site by directly typing your url in their browser address bar.

**Search Visitors:** Users that visit your site based on a search query.

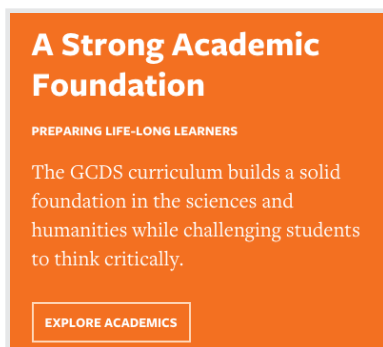
**Referral Visitors:** Users that visit your site because it was mentioned on another blog or site.

# Improving Poor Website Performance

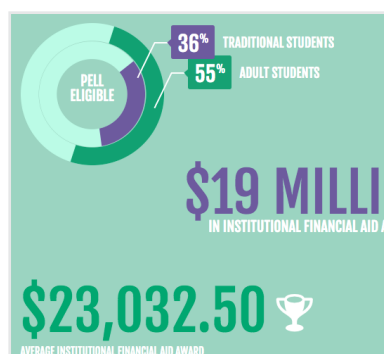
Does your new site suffer from high bounce rates? Content could be the cause. There are three key reasons your pages could have high bounce rates. In any case, you failed to meet the expectation of the person clicking the link:

1. They expected to find something different. In this case, the problem is typically an ad you are running or a keyword you are targeting. The two pieces don't fit perfectly together in your website visitor's mind.
2. Your website falls below their expectations, visually. Today's users have higher expectations than ever before for page design, scannable content, load times and mobile friendliness. Each one of your pages should be carefully crafted with content so that you capture the user's attention in just a few seconds.
3. You're offering a poor mobile experience, or no mobile experience at all.

## Improve Website Performance With These Design Treatments



Try New Calls to Action



Swap Text for Infographics

ADMISSIONS	ACADEMICS
Why Gilman?	Financial Aid
Distinguish Yourself	Transportation
How to Apply: Lower School	Inquire/Apply Online
How to Apply: Middle School	Prospective Parent Visiting Days
How to Apply: Upper School	International Student
Tuition	

Improve Site Structure

# Website Upkeep

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Website maintenance is a never-ending job. To keep your website up to the standards of your community, prospective families and Search, it requires constant fine-tuning.

In this section we cover case studies and answer your content management FAQs.



# The Chapin School: Web Team Success

What started as a way to get organized before their new launch evolved into a weekly meeting that brings together all of the site's stakeholders—along with the occasional training visit from Finalsité staff.

With a core group made up of staff from communications, alumnae/development, the director of technology, the database manager and the associate head of school, the Chapin Web Team carves out an hour and half every Monday to strategize on content, prioritize on what will be posted to the site, troubleshoot and get trained on new modules and services.

The team brings in “guests” several times a year depending on events and site needs—parent association reps or the division heads, for example—to learn what they need from the website, explain changes/updates, and help them see how their job relates to what the Web Team does on the site.

Think your school just doesn't have the time to form a Web Team? Think again.

*“Schools don't have the time not to meet like this. The amount of time we would be spending trying to figure things out on our own would be higher. We save so much time by staying on the same page. You can't afford not to do this.”*

Kelly Hammond  
Director of Middle School Academic  
Technology | Web Team Member  
The Chapin School

The best part about these meetings, says Director of Communications Anneli Ballard, is that it gives the team a chance to have conversations they wouldn't usually have. “Everyone has their hand in different parts of the site,” she said. “Meeting each week has allowed us to understand exactly what each member is doing, to identify issues far more quickly, and to create processes that have made us more efficient. Plus, we learn a lot from one another.”

The team stays in touch between meetings with an email distribution so that any time one team member submits a ticket with Finalsité or has an issue or needs to make a change, the whole Web Team is informed.

“Having a web team has been incredibly valuable,” said Anneli. “We joke because we thought we would disband after the launch had gone successfully, but we quickly realized that we had something really great going.”

# 3 Tips For Maintaining Your Website Team Post-Deployment

## TIP NUMBER 1

### Use data to maintain your web project goals.

“Whether using Google Analytics or another tool, know that if you are going to adjust content, design, navigation, etc., it is important your decisions are based on the data available to you,” said Bridget, the Director of Communications at CCSD 181. CCSD 181 uses website analytics and incorporates website-related questions in parent and staff surveys to ensure they are meeting their needs.

## TIP NUMBER 2

### Anticipate your needs.

You’re busy, so be proactive in your web team meetings. If you know there are upcoming events and content needed, it will be less time consuming and disruptive when you need to develop a new web section or a new focus for your homepage news.

## TIP NUMBER 3

### Study the market.

“Our team enjoys seeing what other school districts (and other types of companies) are doing with their websites,” said Bridget. “We comment on the look, feel, unique tools, content, and more. Sometimes these conversations have led to new ideas for our own site.”

# Archbishop Murphy High School: The ROI of the Responsive Redesign

## Improved Constituent Communications

AMHS launched a new website with the goal of improving the experience for both prospective and current students. One of the most beneficial additions to their website has been private online communities, which provide safe and centralized communications to all the school's different constituent groups.

"The new website has really streamlined our communication efforts both internally and externally," said Shannon McCann, Communications and Website Specialist at AMHS. "For example, we have a parent discussion forum, so if parents have free standing topics to discuss or ask questions about, they can. On our staff end, we replaced a physical bulletin board to an online bulletin board emphasizing community and fellowship."

However, their most popular forum is the textbook forum, which can be accessed by parents and students to buy and trade used textbooks. "Textbooks are expensive — and so that forum has exploded." The employee handbook as well as the school's annual report are also available for viewing on the portals, saving the school thousands of dollars in printing costs.

## An Admissions Experience that Attracts and Converts

"Our entire purpose of the website is admissions — that's why we did the redesign in the first place," said Shannon. "We wanted to market to the prospective student, so our new content for our website is based on the student experience."

"The combination of concise and rich content combined with a design that is visually appealing really drives viewers, which drives admissions."

The result of the new website? "We had the most successful open house this year, ever. Because prospective families could easily register online, we had the largest number of RSVPs."

*"The way we've highlighted our students and the functionality of this website has helped us in our admissions efforts — and of course having an in-house photographer and graphic designer adds another successful element."*

Shannon McCann  
Communications and Website Specialist  
Archbishop Murphy High School

# Managing Your Website: Long-Term Content Management

You change the oil on your car, power wash the siding on your house, reluctantly hit up the treadmill after your workday, and if you miss your dog's annual check up at the vet you feel completely guilty until they can squeeze you in next week.

While these things seem completely unrelated they have one major thing in common: They are all investments, and are essential to your health and happiness that they stay in tip-top shape for as long as possible.

The same is true for your website. It needs maintenance, attention and updating — constantly.

Your school's website is your biggest moneymaker, and a one-time investment of time isn't going to cut it. It's the home for your capital campaign, annual fund, athletic event tickets, online admissions applications, summer camp registration, school pride gear, online tuition payments and more — the list goes on and on.

If you don't keep the content on it important, top hit pages looking fresh and up-to-date, your website traffic (and related assets) are going to drop.

Since you're short on time already, we compiled some of our most frequently asked questions about content management to help you prioritize what needs updating, and when.



# Managing Your Website: Your FAQs — Answered!

## How often should I switch up my visual content?

**Photos:** Some schools like to switch up photos whenever they get new ones from an event, while others have it scheduled into a maintenance plan. You should update homepage slideshows and header images at least annually. Photos that are not integral to your design — like photo albums from plays, alumni events, and athletic events — can stay on your site longer. As long as you're continuing to add photos, older ones can stay put. *Promise your community with a day that new photos from an event will be ready to hold yourself accountable!*

**Videos:** Videos are evergreen content, especially compared to the rest of the content on your website. And typically, they're also a much bigger investment. Plan on switching up your main marketing video every 2-3 years.

**Text Content:** You should review your text content at the same time you review your photos. A slight cleanup should be done annually. However, we recommend a complete text overhaul with any website redesign.

## How often should I post news and events?

You should update your news events frequently and consistently. Be timely. No one wants to read about something months after it's happened.

However, during admissions season in particular, switching up this type of content essential. If applicants see the same photos, news and events every time they visit your website, they get bored and uninterested, which is going to make filling those seats even harder.

## How “Evergreen” Are My Student Testimonials?

Student testimonials should be switched up yearly. No excuses. Think about it this way: if a family is considering your school for a couple years (or admissions seasons) seeing the same four student stories (that they may not even relate to) isn't as impactful.



# About this eBook

Produced through the collaborative efforts of the Marketing, Client Success and Deployment teams at Finalsite, this eBook contains a wealth of knowledge from some of the brightest minds in the industry.

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# About Finalsite

Founded by Jon Moser in 1997, Finalsite has grown to be the leader in our space, serving more than 1,500 clients around the world. Our elegant software, award-winning design, time-saving integrations and expert consulting services provide schools with a complete platform for telling their story online.

Finalsite's online learning and communications platform facilitates the distribution of digital content across school communities, and in classrooms, from both desktops and mobile devices, and also provides admissions offices with a robust, paperless enrollment solution.

Finalsite's software enables customers to engage dynamically with a wide range of third party data providers including student information systems, learning systems and social media applications.

Want to learn more about us? Visit [www.finalsite.com](http://www.finalsite.com)