Getting the Most
Out of Your Chamber's Website

A Step-by-Step Guide to Greatness

Getting the Most Out of Your Chamber's Website

GrowthZone | chambermaster
smarter association software

It's no secret that your chamber's website is critical to your success.

You need your site to engage with members. But you also count on it to be a resource for your industry. Oh, and it has to deliver a great user experience so everyone who visits leaves with a positive impression.

With so many expectations, you can be sure your website has the ingredients to be powerful and engaging by simply taking a step-by-step approach to optimizing it "under-the-hood."

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8 Easy Steps
to Keep Your Chamber Website On Track

Your website is working for you around the clock, making it a key member of your team.

Think of it this way: Your site is often the first interaction someone has with your chamber. As the saying goes, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." So make it count.

Have you ever had a bout of "Inattention Blindness," which means failing to see something right in front of you? Don't worry, you're not alone. This is a real thing, and here's a fantastic video that demonstrates the phenomena.
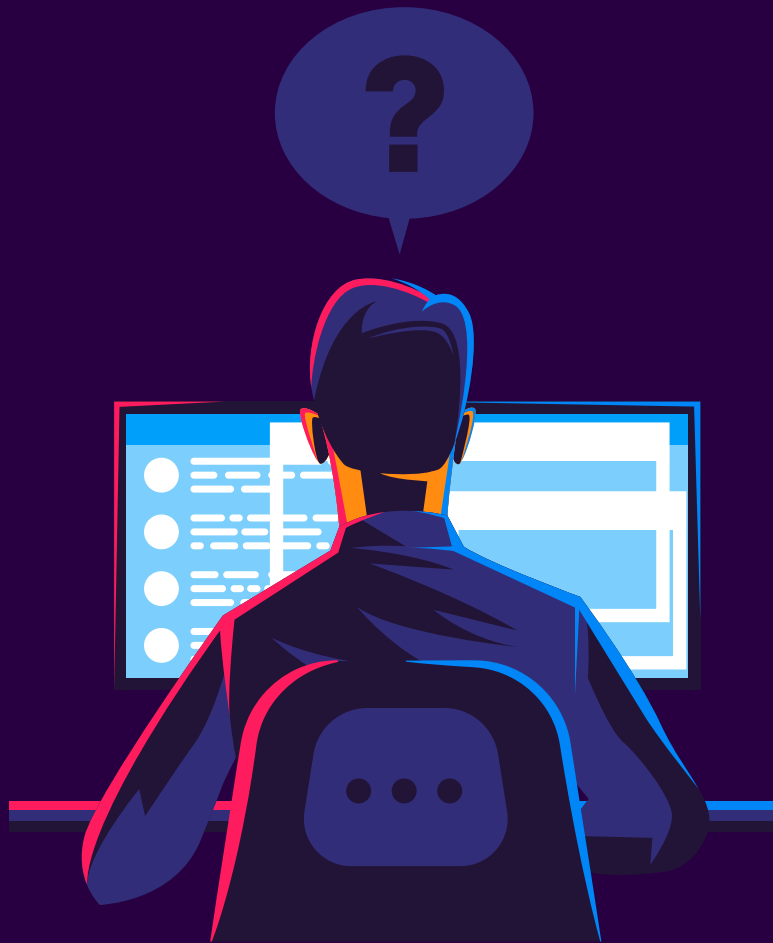
When it comes to your website, avoid "Inattention Blindness" with a quick, 10-minute website analysis. You should set a reminder to do this occasionally to ensure you're always up to speed on using current best practices for chamber websites.

Big Picture Website Analysis

Before you start, determine who your website is for.

Then ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the purpose/function of having a website for your brand?

2. What goals do you want your website to achieve?

3. What needs aren't being met by the current version?

4. What is the most essential information the homepage must relay to the user?

5. What is the most critical thing you want visitors to do when they come to your site?

✓ What do you want newcomers to know or do?

✓ What do you want current members to know or do?

✓ What do you want them to know or understand (assume the user WILL leave after 5 seconds)?

Email

Share

Video

Like

Subscribe

Contact Now

Call now

Download

6. What key pieces of info should be available on every single page of your website?

7. What are the most critical calls-to-action (CTAs) on your site?

8. What specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based (SMART) goals will indicate a successful website?

Laying the foundation for a successful chamber website depends on establishing a clear purpose and specific goals. Whether it's under development, was recently updated, or has been around forever, your website can always be improved.

One size does not fit all.

Design, functionality, and pricing all play a role. GrowthZone specializes in chamber websites and has built hundreds of engaging and compelling sites for organizations.

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Increase Web Traffic with Improved Navigation

A positive user experience is key to the success of any chamber website. The easier it is to navigate, the less time it takes a user to find what they're looking for.

Good website navigation:

✓ Increases visit duration

✓ Lets visitors know they're in the right place to find information

✓ Reduces bounce rates

✓ Improves conversions

✓ Provides a positive user experience

✓ Helps with SEO

Don't reinvent the wheel.

Think like the average user. Visitors don't want to have to figure out how your site works. So make sure your navigation design and structure fall within people's expectations of a typical website.

Your website is an important extension of your organization. GrowthZone's expert team provides cutting-edge functionality and current design options. To help you keep up with best practices, GrowthZone's subscription option empowers you to upgrade to a new website every 36 months (with no money upfront).

WEBSITE NAVIGATION CHECKLIST

VISUAL HIERARCHY

Design with visual hierarchy in mind. Visual hierarchy refers to the elements that draw in the user's eye and capture their attention.

NAVIGATION BAR

The navigation bar or main menu should be prominent, easy to read, and structured according to importance. Include a maximum of 4-6 options. (Consider a "hamburger" menu for mobile.)

SEARCH BAR

A search bar allows a user to find particular topics or pages fast, regardless of where they entered the site. The easier it is to navigate your site, the more likely it is that people will explore it.

STICKY "BACK-TO-TOP" BUTTON

(aka scroll-to-top button)
The sticky back-to-top button stays in a fixed position (sticky), so it's always accessible to the user. It's commonly placed in the lower, right-hand corner of the screen.

ANCHOR TEXT

Anchor text is what you click to move from one page to another. It helps users know what to expect. And search engine algorithms use it to determine the topics you're linking to.

PAGE JUMPS

(aka jump links)
Page jumps allow users to click and quickly move to a specific spot on the same page. They are ideal for use on a long page and handy for external linking to a particular place on a page.

Website Footers Matter. A Lot.

Are you paying attention to the footer on your site? If not, you're missing an opportunity (and you're not alone). A LOT more people see the footer than you might think (particularly on mobile), making it an essential element of any site.

A website footer, found at the bottom of a web page:

- ✓ Helps boost conversions
- ✓ Builds credibility
- ✓ Reduces bounce rates
- ✓ Improves SEO
- ✓ Enhances user experience

A footer tells the user they've reached the end of the webpage. A well-structured footer should be attention-getting and provide an opportunity for further engagement by giving one last opportunity to take action before leaving.
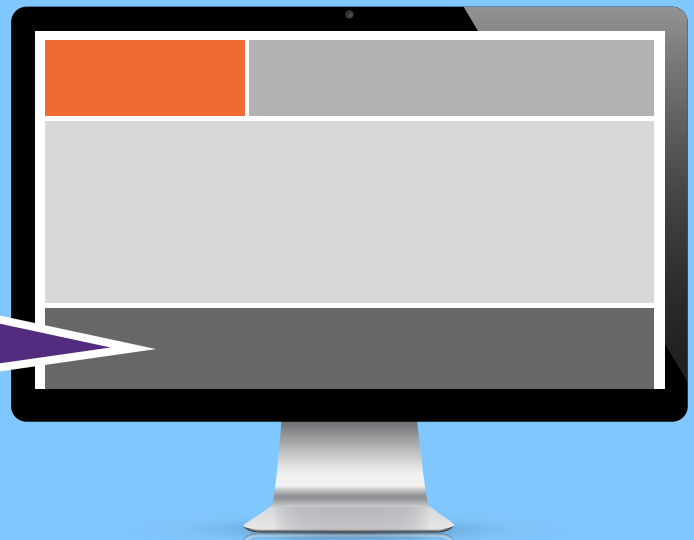
FOOTER DESIGN
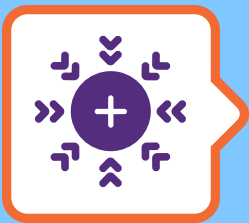
Space
Avoid clutter, and leave plenty of space.

Columns
Include basic links to other sections of your website. Group related links and give each section a relevant title.

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Color

Incorporate your website's theme for continuity. Make sure the text is readable (and ADA accessible) by appropriately contrasting colors.

Navigation

User experience is vital. Providing an intuitive hierarchy is important. If your footer has a lot of information, evaluate the necessity of each component, or consider collapsible menus.

Mobile Optimization

With the popularity of social media, scrolling has become standard practice. On mobile, users typically scroll, and a well-structured footer offers easy navigation options.

Links

The navigation links in a footer make it easy for visitors to keep exploring without scrolling back up. Include useful links to increase the likelihood of visitors opening other pages and spending more time on your site.

SEO

Search engines analyze footers, and quality links help improve SEO ranking. Keywords demonstrate your site's relevance to search engines. Their use should be authentic, and they should be placed in a line of text, not just as a link.

Copyright, Terms of Use, and Privacy Links

Very few people view these pages. Place their links at the very bottom of the footer to get them out of the way.

Including credibility-builders (e.g., awards, certifications, member testimonials, reviews) in the footer can sway users to engage (e.g., complete a form or watch a demo).

COMMON FOOTER ELEMENTS

Include the basics (in bold). Then, as design permits, prioritize other elements, remembering that calls-to-action are a slam dunk for engagement.

- **Navigation Menu**
- **Contact Form**
- **Sitemap**
- **Contact Info (mail, phone, email, etc.)**
- **Terms of Use**
- **Copyright**
- **Privacy Policy**
- **Required Data Privacy Links**

- Branding
- Email/Newsletter Signup
- Call to Action (e.g., upcoming events)
- Latest Blog Posts/Articles
- Login
- Social Icons
- Awards and Certifications
- Press/Media Information
- Site Search Tool
- Address/Link to Map

Be aware that a user may not follow you on social media until they've seen your site. Links in the upper right corner of a site are standard. Include social media links to give the user another opportunity to engage with your chamber (without having to scroll to the top).

Think of the website footer as a secondary menu that helps users find information and provides an opportunity for further engagement. Your footer should never be an afterthought.

> The GrowthZone CMS provides easy and intuitive editing capabilities, including drag-and-drop page template editing, flexible page design, mobile device preview, and easy site-wide editing.

10-Minute SEO for Chamber Websites

Optimizing chamber websites for search engines can seem daunting, but it can be as basic or complex as you choose to make it. You don't have to "go back" and fix things or reinvent the wheel.

What Is SEO?

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the method of driving web traffic from organic (unpaid) search engine results.

SEO drives 53% of all website visits.

The majority of search engine traffic is generated by the "big 4": *

1. Google 83%
2. Baidu 7%
3. Bing (Microsoft) 6%
4. Yahoo 1%

netmarketshare.com, July 2020

How Does SEO Work?

Search engines read (crawl) a site, evaluate the content, and then rank pages based on relevance to the user's query.

High-quality **content that answers the searcher's question is key to improved positioning.**

When it comes to SEO, go with quality over quantity. Relevant, robust content on fewer pages outweighs having a lot of pages with subpar, minimal content.

FYI: If your chamber website has a lot of pages with duplicate content (or very little content), search engines may consider those pages as an attempt to manipulate rankings and will penalize your site.

Use Keywords to Improve Chamber SEO

Keywords are words that describe the content of a page or post and what you want your page to rank for. Include them throughout your site for both your users and search engine crawlers.

Warning:
Determining chamber keywords can be a research rabbit hole. Don't fall in. You can adjust your strategy as you go.

Develop a Keyword Strategy in 10 Minutes

Quick-Start Plan:

To drive relevant traffic to your site, take 10 minutes to identify relevant keywords with good search traffic potential. Then, using the outline below, make a keyword plan of action.

(Don't let it overwhelm you. Start with these SEO basics for chamber websites. You can fine-tune and update your strategy later.)

The GrowthZone CMS is an extension of our product, so customers have access to more knowledgeable support and the ability to suggest feature enhancements.

IDENTIFY KEYWORDS

1. Ask yourself, "What are people actually searching for?" to determine the most common way people search for information related to chambers.

2. Do a few searches based on how you think people search for things relevant to your chamber. Then jot down a basic list with the most common keywords you find.

3. Look for ways other people might search for the same thing. Scan those results for different relevant keywords or phrases that didn't make your first list and add them.

4. Start including the keywords from your list in your website copy.

GROW YOUR KEYWORD LIST OVER TIME

• Stay informed about relevant topics that impact your ideal user (e.g., chamber member, prospective member, etc.).

• Subscribe to industry newsletters or follow question-answer sites (e.g., Reddit or Quora).

• Track forums, join social media groups, etc.

• These sources will help you determine trends and identify keywords that relate to them. Be sure to add those words to your list and include them in site copy going forward.

DIVE DEEPER (if you want to).

✓ Get details about actual keyword rankings.

✓ <u>Test a free keyword ranking platform.</u>

✓ Research keyword metrics behind the keywords you're targeting.

✓ <u>Determine the search volume</u> of terms you're targeting.

✓ Identify keyword difficulty (i.e., How difficult would it be to outrank other chamber sites on a search engine results page?).

A keyword list is fluid, so to continue to leverage current, relevant terms, add to it regularly. Once you begin to include keywords in your content, it will become second nature.

Remember, including keywords throughout your website is beneficial to your users AND the search engine crawlers, both of which are beneficial to your organization.
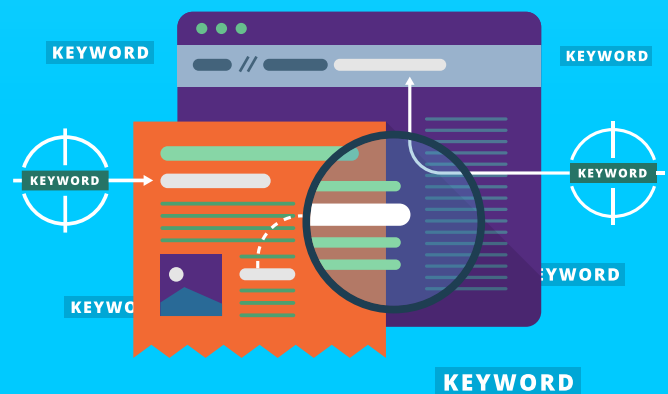
Stop Wondering What to Put in Your Website URL

Each page on your website has a unique address – commonly known as a URL (uniform resource locator).

A URL is like anything else on the web, it can be good, it can be bad, or it can be ugly. It's one of the most important aspects of making sure your website shows up in search engine results.

So, what makes a "good" URL? Two things (which go hand-in-hand): a positive user experience and an SEO-friendly structure.

Familiarizing yourself with URL components will smooth the path (and seriously, it's not complicated).

URL BASICS

A well-crafted URL makes it easy for both humans and search engines to "understand" what your page is about.

URLs should be short, simple, and descriptive.

Shorter URLs are easier:

- for search engines to crawl
- to copy and paste
- to share on social
- to embed

To craft a strong URL:

- Make it easily readable by humans
- Avoid special characters and stick to lowercase characters - uppercase letters can create problems
- Use hyphens to separate words (avoid underscores)
- Keep it roughly in the 50-60 character range
- Match the URL to the page titles (when it makes sense)
- Steer away from stop words (and, or, the, but, etc.) to help keep the URL shorter

KEEP IT ORGANIZED

The URL should be neatly structured. A carefully organized site-navigation method improves the user experience.

Your URLs always start with your website's root domain and from there, tie into the site architecture *(e.g., www.yourwebsitename.com)*

Hierarchy-based "breadcrumbs" provide a secondary navigation option, letting users know where they are on the website. A visually pleasing, simple breadcrumb trail enriches the user experience, and search engine crawls.

EXAMPLE:

Homepage
https://www.yourdomain.com/

Parent Category (events)
https://www.yourdomain.com/events/

Subcategory (calendar)
https://www.yourdomain.com/events/calendar/

Current Page (september)
https://www.yourdomain.com/events/calendar/september/

AVOID DYNAMIC AND PARAMETER URLs:

Good URL structure:
https://www.yourdomain.com/blog/event-ideas/

Parameters/Dynamic URLs:
https://www.yourdomain.com/category.php?id=14
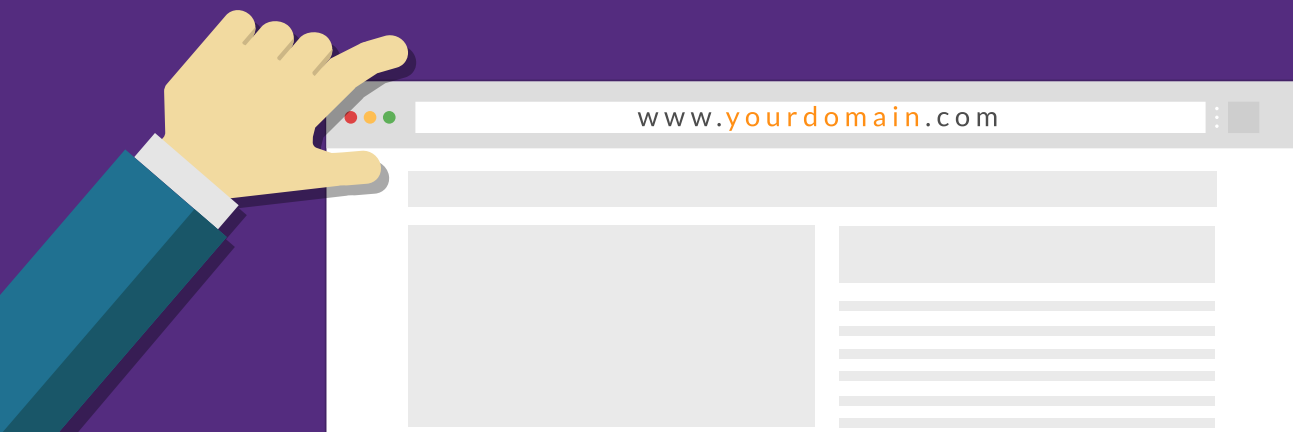
www.yourdomain.com

SUBDOMAINS

A subdomain is text placed at the beginning of your URL. It is used to distinguish specific website content (e.g., e-commerce store, blog, etc.).

Example: store.yourdomain.com

By separating the "store" from the rest of the website, you're providing an extension of your site that appears or functions differently, while still providing a positive user experience. For help on when to use a subdomain or to add one to your site, check with your site manager or host.

http://subdomain.domain.com

GrowthZone ensures your site is secure with included SSL certificates across all content and pages.

HTTPS not HTTP

HTTPS (HyperText Transfer Protocol
Secure) means a website is secured
by an SSL certificate. The "S" is short
for SSL (Secure Sockets Layer), which
safeguards communications between
the visitor and the chamber website.
SSL protects sensitive information,
preventing criminals from accessing
the data.

Determining if Your Site is Secure

Take a look at your site's URL in the browser bar. If you see a padlock, you're using HTTPS. No
padlock? You're not using it.

Most sites transitioned from HTTP to HTTPS a while ago, but there are often remaining internal
links that point to the HTTP URL instead of the updated version.

Talk to your website manager or server host to arrange for a site-wide HTTP to HTTPS redirect.

While you're at it, take it a step further:

Ask them to make sure Google is only indexing ONE version of your site. There's a chance you have a variety of site versions:

https://www.yourdomain.com
https://yourdomain.com
http://www.yourdomain.com
http://yourdomain.com

Search

Establish one domain version

You should have a primary version, and all others should point to a 301 redirect. It's simple to check; just enter each version in your browser bar. If it redirects to your primary site address, you're set. But if you're accessing different versions, set up redirects ASAP.

Do. Not. Keyword. Stuff.

A keyword is a single word, or a phrase searched for online.
Stuffing is shoving a lot of keywords into the URL in
an attempt to improve SEO. It doesn't work and will do
more harm than good.

CHANGING A URL

If you need to change a URL after it's published, use a 301 redirect to point from the old URL to the new one.

A search engine sees them as two different pages and considers that in the ranking. The new URL hasn't earned any ranking power.

Using a 301 explains to the search engine what's going on with the page. It allows it to transfer the ranking from old to new and deindex the old page, eliminating it from search results.

TRAILING SLASHES

https://www.yourdomain.com/

or

https://www.yourdomain.com

To slash or not to slash?

Using a trailing slash isn't right or wrong. But there can be a negative impact on SEO. The majority of website CMS systems will "decide" whether to include the slash, and it won't be something that you will need to address when building a URL.

It doesn't take any longer to create strategically optimized URLs. It's a win for users and your chamber's website. Give it a shot!

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GrowthZone Websites
Where Flexibility and Great Design Meet

One size does not fit all.

That's why GrowthZone gives you a range of website options to pick from in terms of design, functionality, and pricing. Depending on your level of customization and budget, we offer design packages at every level to fit your needs. All websites are built on a mobile-friendly, responsive platform.

Already have a chamber website?

GrowthZone ChamberMaster Edition easily integrates with existing sites, empowering organizations to leverage GrowthZone benefits to improve the user experience and strengthen your online presence.

> "We are very pleased with the new look of our GrowthZone website. It feels modern, and the layout options are greater. Since the transition, we have more control over what content we can edit, and overall, the website functions much better, especially on mobile. The transition was very smooth, and everyone I worked with throughout the process was pleasant and helpful."
> Kristine A. Scott
> American Council of Engineering Companies

GrowthZone ChamberMaster Edition

GrowthZone ChamberMaster Edition helps chambers of commerce grow and retain membership, engage and inform members and prospects, and streamline tedious tasks. The cloud-based system is powerful, easy to use, and designed to manage all the day-to-day operations of your organization. Guaranteed.

Contact us today for a personalized product demo.

GET DEMO