



SINDELAR
communications
& marketing

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How to Update Your Website



How to Update Your Website

1. Why
2. Who
3. What
4. How



Why might you be *avoiding* updating a website?

- **Cost:** *no idea if you can afford it*
- **Process:** *sounds daunting, no idea how or where to begin*
- **Time:** *staff already too busy with more important priorities*
- *The devil you know (your current website) could be better than the devil you don't?*

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SEO: Search Engine Optimization – steps that make sure people can find your website on the internet

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Why might you *want* to update (or build) a website?

- *You don't have one*
- *You do have a website, but it's...*
 - *hard for customers to find what they need*
 - *hard for staff to update (e.g., holiday hours, board minutes, newsletters, updated forms)*
 - *out of date or missing key information*
 - *doesn't look professional/inspire confidence*

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Who will build, update, and troubleshoot your website?

Three Methods:

In-House: *Staff has skills and availability to build and maintain*

Hybrid: *Consultant builds (working jointly with staff); staff does ongoing updates; consultant available for maintenance or troubleshooting if needed*

Out-of-House: *Hire consultant / agency who coordinates, designs, trains staff to do updates, does required maintenance, and handles troubleshooting*



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Who will build, update, and troubleshoot? (continued)

Necessary Qualities for Building Websites:

- **Technical skills:** *how comfortable, how savvy?*
- **Talents:** *layout/design, gathering and organizing information, writing, photography, coordinating staff (and/or outside consultants), troubleshooting*
- **Website best practices:** *search engine optimization, navigation, usability, trends, efficiencies*
- **Available time**
- **Training:** *fast learner? Good teacher?*

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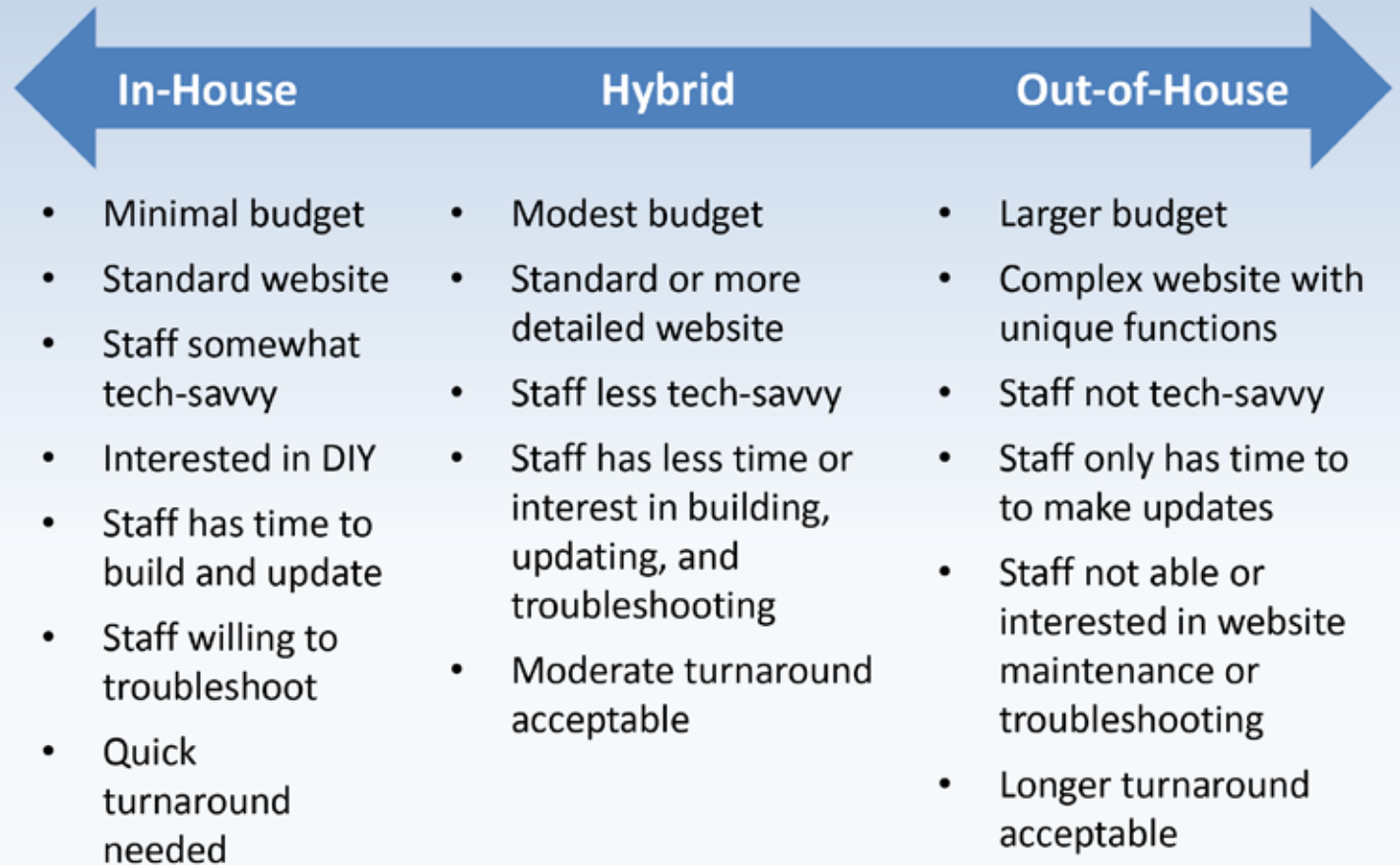
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Who will build, update, and troubleshoot? (continued)

Decision Factors:



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What options exist for building your website?

- *Drag-n-Drop Platforms*
- *Wordpress Platform*
- *Custom-Built Websites*



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The Wix logo consists of the word "WIX" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "i" is lowercase and has a small orange dot above it.

SQUARESPACE

The web.com logo features the text "web.com" in a blue, lowercase, sans-serif font. A small registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the "m".

Building with a “Drag and Drop” Website Platform

- *Wix, Squarespace, Web.com, Weebly, etc.*
- *Software, template, various functions, hosting, tracking, and security... all included / in one place*
- *Hundreds of templates, or design from scratch*
- *Easy “drag and drop” approach for building, customizing, and updating (with average staff skills)*
- *No component maintenance, but components are available if you have special needs*
- *Troubleshooting is included and typically performed by the platform’s support staff*

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Building with Wordpress

- *“CMS” platform (content management system) = think of a database that stores your content*
- *Requires multiple components (software, template, features, hosting, tracking, security) to function*
- *Most of these components are provided by different companies with separate costs and support*
- *Most components must be maintained separately; updates can cause some to stop working with others*
- *Making routine website updates requires staff familiar with Wordpress (slightly higher skill level)*
- *Customization requires technical skills*
- *Troubleshooting often requires technical skills*

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Building a Custom Coded Website (Developer/Agency)

- *Developer-designed and coded using CSS + HTML, Drupal, or Joomla platforms (example: CivicPlus government websites)*
- *Provides maximum flexibility for a maximum budget—excellent for highly complex websites*
- *Requires staff training to manage routine updates*
- *The developer typically provides the hosting and routine maintenance (for an annual fee)*
- *Troubleshooting usually requires developer skills*

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What Type of Website Platform is Right for Your District?

Factors to consider:

- *Cost*
- *Ease of making updates*
- *In-house staff have good technical skills*
- *In-house staff have good writing / design skills*
- *In-house staff are readily available*
- *Tolerance and skill for troubleshooting*
- *Tolerance for templates –vs– custom details*
- *Schedule / timeline*
- *Special functions (shopping carts, memberships)*

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What Platform is Right for Your District? (continued)

Drag-n-Drop

PROS:

- Less cost
- One-stop shop
- Easy DIY / not much technical skill required
- Staff can update
- Standard responsiveness
- Troubleshooting included
- Quick turnaround

CONS:

- Standard device responsiveness

Wordpress

PROS:

- Moderate cost
- Endless components
- Moderate DIY flexibility
- Staff can update (with some tech skill)
- Maximum device responsiveness
- Moderate turnaround

CONS:

- Some tech skill required
- Component upkeep
- Additional costs for hosting, security and some components
- May need help with troubleshooting

Custom-Coded

PROS:

- Maximum flexibility and unique functions
- Less staff involvement required (outsourced)
- Staff can update (with training)
- Maximum device responsiveness

CONS:

- Much higher cost
- Tied to developer for hosting / security / changes / maintenance / troubleshooting (cost)
- Longer turnaround

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How to Build Your Website

in 10 Steps

1. Identify WHO
2. Choose your PLATFORM
3. Register or confirm a DOMAIN
4. Collect your CONTENT
5. REVIEW your content
6. Map out a STRUCTURE
7. Identify DESIGN DIRECTION
8. Get it BUILT
9. LAUNCH AND TEST the website
10. ANNOUNCE the website

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How to Build Your Website *in 10 Steps*

1. Identify WHO

In-house, hybrid, or out-of-house... which staff will get involved in the process? Create a website committee.

2. Choose your PLATFORM

*Drag-n-drop, Wordpress, or custom-coded; if Wordpress, choose a hosting company too. *The host can also provide you with a domain + domain email; see next step.*

3. Register or confirm a DOMAIN

If you don't have a domain / URL / www address, you'll need one... and will probably also want domain email. If you already have a domain, confirm your domain registration account ("registrar") and current email set-up

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How to Build Your Website in 10 Steps, continued

4. Collect your CONTENT

Visual (Electronic photos):

- Logo
 - Projects and/or crews working on the job
 - Facilities, equipment, components
 - Commissioners and staff
- * Drag-n-drop platforms offer many free stock photos)*

Written:

- About your District, history, mission statement
- Your utility services, service area, components
- Account info, billing, bill pay
- Staff and commissioners
- Meeting schedule/agendas/minutes, documents, forms
- FAQs? Helpful resources? Developer information?

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How to Build Your Website in 10 Steps, continued

Content Collection Tips:

- Ask your receptionist: what are the top 3 questions people call about? These answers need to be easily found on your website in the appropriate area (including FAQs for added clarity).*
- Ask a few friends, trusted customers, and/or family members to review your website, and tell you how easily they could find...*
 - *What to do in case of a utility emergency*
 - *How to set up a new account / service*
 - *What the current billing rate and billing cycle is*
 - *Board meeting agendas and minutes*
 - *How to obtain Customer Service (with name/contact info)*

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How to Build Your Website in 10 Steps, continued

More Content Collection Tips:

- For ease of organization and review, create 1 Microsoft Word document for each page of your website (1 page titled “Home,” 1 page titled “About,” etc.), that include notes about photos you want on the page. Don’t embed photos into Word; they need to be provided as separate .jpg files.*
- KEEP IT SHORT. Website text is usually NOT lengthy—short sentences and paragraphs are best.*
- In addition to free stock photos available from the “drag and drop” website platforms, you can also find high quality free stock images on the following websites:*

www.pixabay.com

www.unsplash.com

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How to Build Your Website in 10 Steps, continued

5. REVIEW your content

- Does your home page include the following information in a very visible location? (these are the main reasons people visit a District website):*
 - *Phone number/address*
 - *Hours*
 - *Bill pay button (or options)*
- Once all content is assembled, have the website committee read / edit to make sure it's complete, accurate, and there are no spelling or grammatical errors.*
- Provide edited / updated content to your District Manager for final review and approval.*

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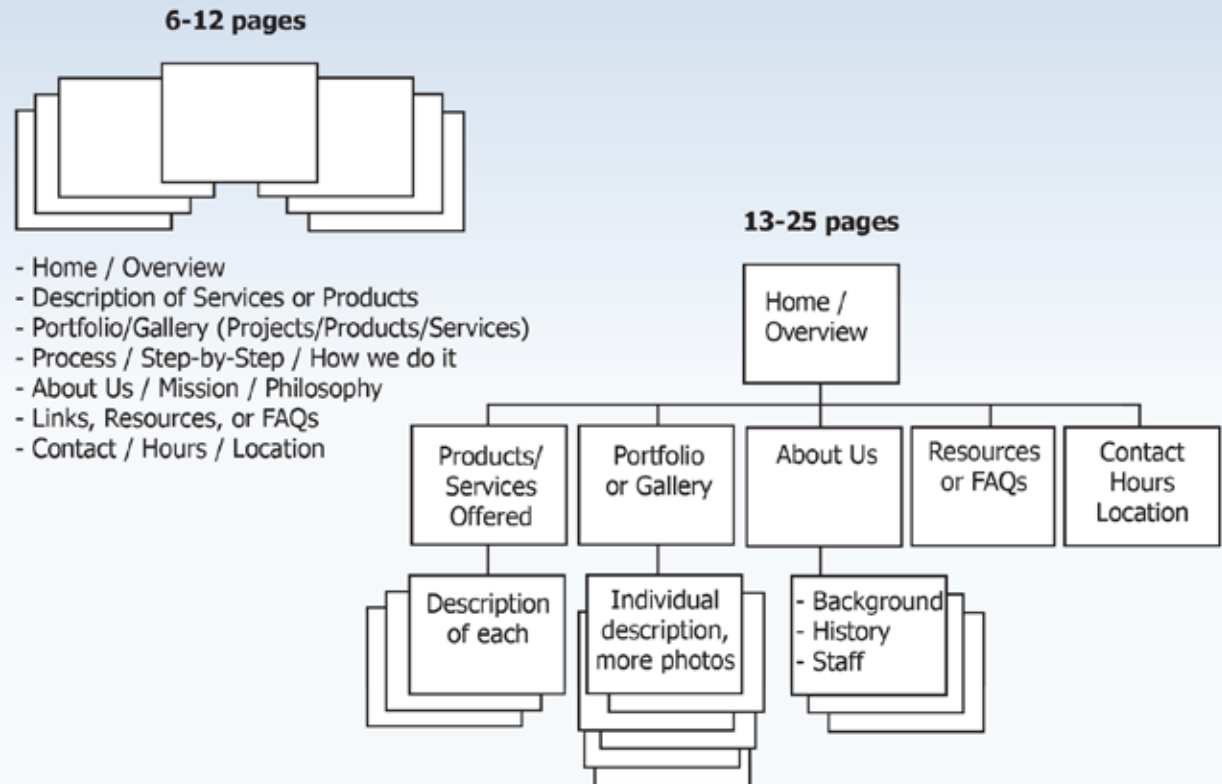
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6. Map out a STRUCTURE

Develop an outline of how your content will be organized in a way that helps customers easily locate what they need



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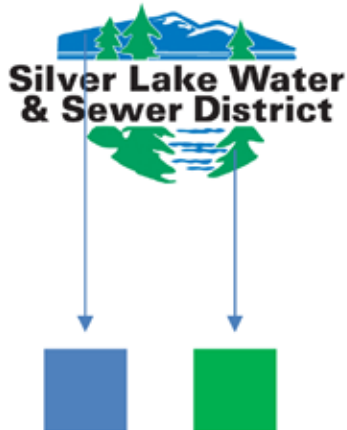
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7. Identify a DESIGN DIRECTION

- Choose 2-3 colors (typically the main colors of your logo, unless you're in the process of updating your brand)
- If you already have a website, take a screenshot of the home page and 2-3 other key pages. These can be used for inspiration, or design consistency, or even for contrast if you'd like to move away from that look.
- If you have a brochure or other printed materials, collect copies (again for inspiration, consistency, or contrast).
- Visit other websites and write down the domains/URLs of those that have a look that you like (or specific elements).

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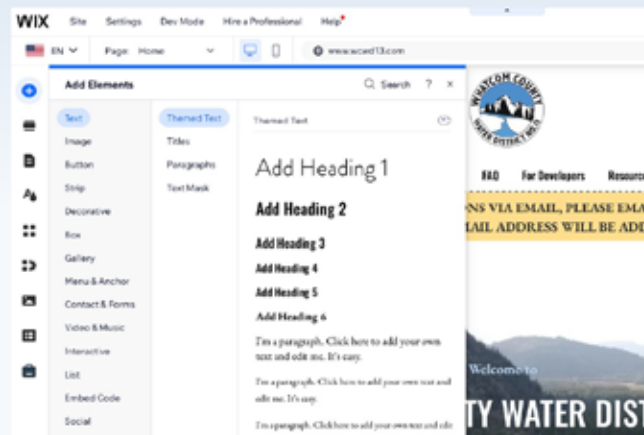
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8. Get it BUILT

Whether in-house, hybrid, or out-of-house, provide your website builder with #3 through #7 (domain info, written content, electronic images, the proposed structure, and your design preferences).



You'll work together to build the website, typically starting with a "test site" so you and your website committee can review and fine-tune development, test out functions, and approve as it evolves.

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9. LAUNCH AND TEST your website

After you click the “publish” button...

- Connect your Domain:** *this may require some technical steps to ensure it doesn’t override your domain email function. Your domain registrar, or hosting company, or consultant can help with this.*
- Get Visible:** *Finalize your search engine steps (if you haven’t already) and register the website with Google. NOTE: Google can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks to begin “ranking” your website in search.*
- Test it Again:** *do another review and test of all website links, pages, and functions to make sure everything is working properly.*

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How to Build Your Website in 10 Steps, continued

10. ANNOUNCE your website

Alert customers, legislators, vendors, and public agencies:

- Letterhead / Business Card / Brochure:** *add the domain to all of your printed materials, if it's not already there.*
- Billing Insert:** *include a special announcement insert (and be sure it's on the billing statement too).*
- Email:** *add your domain to your email signature.*
- Newsletter:** *include an article in your newsletter.*
- Social Media:** *include an announcement on your social.*
- Postal Mail:** *mention your new website in any letters / communications / direct mail postcards you send out.*

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Typical District Website Goals:

- ✓ **Affordable**
- ✓ **Easy to Maintain**
- ✓ **Looks Nice / Professional**

...and usually in that order

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