

Whether you are designing and launching your website in-house or choose to seek an outside consultant/professional web designer, basic website best practices provide the foundation of success in branding or rebranding your ECC.

## IT ALL BEGINS WITH RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT

This is the most time consuming and tedious step, but also the most important. Research and analysis provide the tools to establish your ECC website goals and objectives.

For ACDC's site, I conducted a literature review of user-based public safety website design (including engaged social media), a review of state and local legislation and a website analysis of stand-alone and consolidated dispatch centers.

## LITERATURE AND LEGISLATIVE REVIEW

General research of website design and best practices is bountiful on the internet and a great place to start. Modern websites typically use four basic components of user-centered web design: creative aesthetics, organizational assimilation, performance and adaptability. Consider researching academic databases and discipline-specific sources for studies specific to public safety websites. Some resources for this type of research include LexisNexis, the International Journal of Police Science & Management, Police Quarterly, and Behavior and Information Technology. Be sure to review any available state and local legislation related to electronic media/mass communication.

## WEBSITE ANALYSIS

Using criteria found in your literature and legislative research, create a spreadsheet categorizing creativity, organization, performance and adaptability such as:

- Stand-alone website/associated page
- Appearance
- Difficult/easy to read (font, language, grammar, etc.)
- Difficult/easy to locate information/links
- Linear page performance/integrated page performance
- Citizen-based integrations (links, downloads, etc.)
- Integration of social media

Select a variety of public safety websites similar to your own ECC and analyze each according to the criteria you chose. As you compare websites, patterns will emerge identifying those criteria you wish to employ in the form and function of your website. This analytical process is a useful tool to use for rebranding current websites in need of a face-lift.

**Your website is key to facilitating connections with those you serve before and after the 9-1-1 call.**

## DEFINE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Using the results from your research and analysis, define the immediate and ongoing goals and objectives for your ECC website. You may want to consider public relations technologies, strategies for aggregate website and social media monitoring, tools to engage users initially and plans for ongoing interaction, optimal analytics and integration, launch execution details, a timeline for implementation, metric monitoring, and ongoing maintenance.

## TIMELINE & COST ANALYSIS

It was crucial to create a timeline with detailed descriptions of each component, related tasks and related costs to get the ACDC website from concept to execution. This was my "to do" list.

Describe each task in detail and assign a due date. Identify costs, including personnel costs, related to implementation, maintenance, analytics and policy/procedural updates. Meticulous itemization is vital for ECCs that must seek approval for a new or refreshed website or website page via a formal proposal system.

Undoubtedly, the most time-consuming and costly task is building the actual website — in-house using a website platform or working with a website developer. If you hire a developer, try to find one who has built public safety, local, state or governmental websites. If you choose to build in-house, be sure to research and include the cost of potential website platforms, anticipated

personnel hours and proprietary software integration (if applicable).

## IMPLEMENTATION

Don't forget about public relations (PR). Your implementation timeline should include a PR plan from execution of the first task on your "to do" list to the actual site launch. Get the word out! If you are refreshing your website, post a preview of your new look, features and content on your home page. If you are building a new website, post your project and progress on social media. Consolidated ECCs, ask your member agencies to help promote on their platforms as well. Offer PR materials during implementation and upon project completion.

## MAINTENANCE & ANALYTICS

Once you launch your website the real fun begins as visitors peruse your site!

Website platforms integrate search engine optimization (SEO), a tool to improve site visibility in search results. The more visibility, the more traffic to your site. Some platforms offer on-site metrics or you may use popular browsers (e.g., Google, Bing) to track singular or aggregate data, such as user information and pageviews. Website metrics provide your roadmap for continued success as you identify trends and make appropriate adjustments on the site to keep visitors returning.

After launching the ACDC website, I incorporated a schedule of maintenance to check links, adjust content, tweak pages, add new information, and run metrics for the website and social media outlets. Within three months of launch in 2018, we had 1,300+ visitors. Today, our website boasts an average of 5,800+ visitors-per-month, and in 2020 it registered 22,700+ pageviews. Please consider visiting our site ([www.acdc-dispatch.org](http://www.acdc-dispatch.org)) and connecting with us! ●

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