

Ten Tips for Successful Economic Development Website **by Martha Weaver**

Our company recently reviewed websites of North American economic development organizations to include in our online database. As a result we learned a lot about the virtual world of economic development. The following ten tips are key to a successful website.

1. Provide unique content that your website visitors want and need. Your challenge when writing for a website is to convey the uniqueness of your community, which requires text beyond "family-friendly environment", "low cost of doing business" and "a skilled and diverse workforce."
2. Once you have used a domain be sure to retain ownership so that a potential client doesn't end up on a porn site when they click on your old url that they bookmarked a long time ago. (This really happens.)
3. Use legible fonts. While data at the top of a page is more likely to be read and many people do not scroll down, using small type faces will make a website impossible to read.
4. Busy backgrounds are distracting and in most cases just plain ugly. There are some very beautiful and usable website backgrounds made by very knowledgeable graphic designers, but these are not cheap; so unless it is a deep pocket website that can afford a top professional designer, stay away from graphic backgrounds.
5. Flashing text is disrupting. One website had text at the top of every page that flashed about ten times a second without stopping. There was good information on the pages, but it was almost impossible to read with this annoying distraction. Same thing can be said for scrolling banners.
6. Underlining signifies a link; underlining for emphasis violates a basic web convention.
7. Put contact information or a direct link to it on every page of your website. Contact information should include everything you put on your company's business cards so that website visitors can easily add the information to their contact management system in just one step. Include full addresses and phone numbers for out-of-area visitors who don't know where "City Hall" is located. Never use a graphic for the contact information since that requires the reader to retype the address and many will not bother.
8. Inevitably a user will attempt to access a webpage that does not exist. Probably this happens most often because of typos. When this does happen your server provides a generic 404 error page, but it contains nothing to help your visitor figure out "what next." Have your developer provide a custom 404 page that helps your visitors find the information that they are seeking.
9. Check your website statistics, which your web host service or developer should be able to provide. No need in most cases to buy a separate package. So-called "hit counters" are a sure giveaway of an unsophisticated website designer.
10. Plan and budget for maintenance. Have your website developer provide input forms and templates or set the site up to use a content management system such as [Adobe®
Contribute® CS3](#) so that staff can update website information as needed.