



Author Website Updates

Your website is more important than ever. You can no longer only plan on meeting people in person and winning them over; you have to woo them online – and that includes on your website. If you haven't worked on your site in a while, now is a good time to update the content, fix any errors, and refresh the design so that it looks inviting.

This workbook will share a few of the things you should look for when updating a site, and then explain how you might go about the process of refreshing your site.

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Here are 18 questions you might ask about your website.

Content

1. Are all your books listed on your site? Do they have the correct covers? Are the blurbs and buy links up to date?
2. Does your author bio mention the correct number of kids and pets? Does the author photo make you look good? Is the photo current?
3. Is your event calendar current? Have you removed the canceled events, and added your livestream events? (Now might be a good time to add a calendar if you don't have one.)
4. Is the book mentioned on your home page as “coming soon” actually coming soon, or was it published last year?
5. Are there any typos in your blog posts? (When was the last time you published one?)
6. Do you have a subscribe box in the sidebar so that visitors can follow your blog?

Cont'd.

Tech

7. Does your mailing list form work? If you put in a name and email address, will the subscriber info be added to your subscriber list?

8. Are there any broken links in the menu? Does the menu include all your important pages?

9. How fast do the pages load?

10. Do all the links on your home page work? What about your other pages?

11. If you fill out the contact form, will the message be sent or will the site eat it?

12. Do you have share buttons on all blog posts?

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Design

13. Can someone look at your site, and tell which genre you write?
14. Does your home page have a clear message for visitors?
15. Do you encourage visitors to engage in some way? (This could include sending you a message, signing up for your mailing list, etc.)
16. Are your background images so busy that they distract from your site's content, or do they stay in the background where they belong?
17. Does your site look cluttered, or does it have lots of blank space?
18. Is the text legible, or does it tend to blend into the background?

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These are some tough questions to answer, I know. Most of us have trouble spotting errors in our own work, which can make it difficult to check the content. Also, not everyone has the skills to answer the tech questions or the experience that would enable them to answer the design questions.

And frankly, this is an overwhelming number of questions (even for me).

This is why I recommend that you assemble a team to help you evaluate your site. You can think of this team like your beta readers, and in fact they would be a good place to start. Ask your beta readers to join this new team, and if you are good friends with a graphic designer, you might ask them for their opinion. (Obviously you shouldn't ask them to work for free, but perhaps you could find a way to trade favors?) You might also ask your tech expert author friend to help by answering the tech questions.

Once you have assembled a roster of about a dozen to a score of volunteers, break them up into smaller teams and assign each team specific questions to answer. Ask each team to look at specific pages on your site, and report back.

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The reason you want to assign tasks to each team is so that all pages will get checked, and all questions will be answered. If you just let your helpers look at whatever they want, you will find that some pages will be checked by everyone while other pages won't be checked at all. The only way to make sure that all the issues on your entire site have been found is to give specific assignments.

You want to be thorough, so if possible have at least three people answer each question and check each page.

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When the answers start coming in, compile them into a list. Identify which issues are important, and which ones aren't actually problems. Then sort the list into two lists, one for things you can fix yourself and another for things that you need someone else to fix for you.

Will your budget stretch to hiring an expert? If not, could you work out a trade or maybe learn how to do the work yourself?

A lack of money and time has killed more projects than I would like to admit, so don't beat yourself up too badly if you have to leave problems unresolved. Instead, add this project to your to do list so you can remember to get back to it one day.

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