



# I have social media. Why do I need a website?

Gregory Caswell, AEF Executive Director

There are many groups out there whose online presence exists solely on social media. Some of them are doing quite well engaging and growing their audience on the variety of platforms available. Some may never consider developing a website for their content and rightfully so. If it's working, why bother?

Well, there are a few things to consider before we consider this matter closed.

Earlier in my PR career, I was supporting a nonprofit that holds parties and gatherings to raise funds for our local LGBTQ2IA+ community. Despite my previous training saying they would benefit from a website, they had gained a massive social media following and their events were always packed without one. Broaching the subject of adding a website to their communications portfolio was always a challenge.

Websites versus social media is often a question in grassroots groups like the one I volunteered for. If you're reading this post, it's likely you're in the process of figuring it out yourself. As a firm believer in websites, here are my reasons to take the plunge.

## A website is your online house.

I like to think of a website as an online house – or store, which many of them are. In real life, when you go to someone's house or store, you're welcomed as a guest. You get to learn about your host, the things they're interested in, what they do, what they offer. You're spending some quality time getting to know each other. And if you're enjoying yourself, you're likely going to stay there for a while. Who knows, maybe you liked being there so much you become a regular visitor.

Your website is similar. It allows you to share in more depth than you're able to on social media. Your guest can learn about you, your history, and your values. They may take an interest in your programs and services. They may even buy something, or if you're a charity, leave you a donation.

Social media on the other hand is like the invitation to the house. And since the typical person on social media has way more friends than in real life, they're getting a ton of invitations every second of every day. They scroll through them with no real consequence – they don't even have to RSVP – until one catches their attention and they click on it. Typically, this link will





take them to a house to read a blog, watch a video, or engage in some other content. They have chosen, if even briefly, to stop looking at the invitations altogether and commit to visiting someone.

Good analogy, huh?

## The perception of credibility.

The average Google search will bring up both a website and a social media account. Sure, some people may be trying to find you on social media, but with search functions built into all platforms, it's likely that they are Googling you to find your website. So what happens if they don't find one?

The answer to that is going to depend on the user. Some may just be trying to contact you, which they can do through social media. But others may be looking for something more tangible, in depth, or requiring a level of security before contacting you, which a website is better at providing.

Websites also offer a sense of credibility. Although this perception is changing rapidly as our relationship with the online world evolves, there is something concrete about a website that says that you're legitimate.

## Fairly inexpensive and easy to manage.

Literally, anyone can have a website. It has never been easier or more affordable to create one.

There are many platforms out there that have nominal annual fees. I recommend doing your research and picking the one that works best for you. Most have taken into account that not everyone is a web designer, and offer easy-to-use drag-and-drop templates. Based on your experience and the readiness of your content, your website can be live within a couple of hours.

## BONUS: How to use social media and websites together.

Think of your social media and your website as a cycle. Someone might first hear about you through social media or Google – they RSVP'd to your invitation – and have decided to visit. When it's time for them to leave, you want to make sure to invite them back, or at least know





when you have sent out an “invitation.” The best way to do this is to include your social media links in a prominent place on your website – in the contact page, footer, or both – so that, if they choose, they can easily follow you. Once they follow you, you’ve created an important connection, and if they liked their first experience, they’re likely to return to your website for a second.

My friends at the super-fun party-throwing nonprofit eventually decided to invest in a website, and it’s serving them well. Other than their events, they don’t update it as much as their social media, which is fine. Website content is nowhere near as fleeting as social media.

But having a website has created opportunities to better recognize their sponsors, share their mission and values with their community, and even hold an online Pride event despite COVID-19. They have built a beautiful house and are sending out their invitations.

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