# FIVE RULES FOR ARTS ORGANIZATION WEBSITES

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Every organization has a website and I don't need to go over how important a good website is to your organization's identity as well as ticket sales and contributions. However, *we can always make our websites better*. Here are some rules to help arts organization websites be the best that they can be:

1. **Your Homepage Is Key:** Your website homepage is the most important page on your website. Think of it as the first step in turn-by-turn driving directions. When people arrive at your site, you want to be sure to highlight what is important on the homepage and provide easy access to additional information in the form of links. Your homepage shouldn't contain every last bit of information about a particular event or program, just a direct link that is enticing enough for people to click to access the additional information. Check out these examples of very different organizations who accomplish this well on their homepages. You'll notice that there isn't a whole lot of text on the homepage, but rather links to other pages on the site.
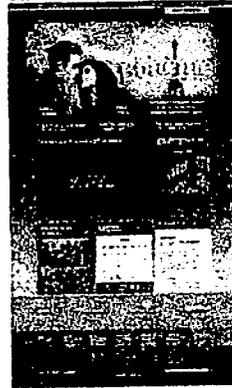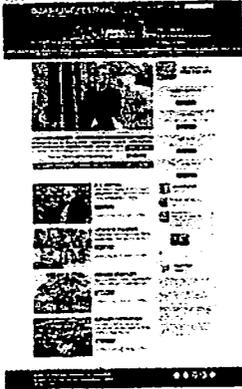
While I'm on the subject, please indulge me in a little bit of a rant. Please don't have your blog as the main content feature on your homepage. Even if your blog is very active and has interesting posts, you are wasting prime real estate! Put simple links to recent posts somewhere else on the homepage instead of feeding the entire blog there.

2. **Update and Update Often:** A website is a kinetic entity and should be updated often. If your website is built in a way that you (or your organization) has to rely on a third party to update your site, you should seriously consider rebuilding the site in a manner that will allow you to update the site quickly yourself (read: open source CMS). Website updates don't just mean updating artist bios or adding new events, but also making sure your homepage reflects what is important now and adding new content to interior pages.

On a related note, actively reviewing your website analytics is a great way to find out what content is working and what isn't. Goals and funnels are great for tracking specific behaviors such as ticket purchases or participation in a contest because you can track viewers' path through various pages on your site. If you have a certain path you intend someone to follow and they abandon it before reaching the goal, that is great information for you to be able to improve the content on the site. Also, if you have a page that you view as being very important but it is not getting any traffic, you now know that something needs to be changed to get more people on that page.

3. **Add Multimedia:** You may not have the room in your budget to pay for promo videos or the know-how to make them yourself, but there are a lot of tools out there that can help you create multimedia content for your website. Multimedia content is one of the best ways to get information about your venue or performance out there and is more and more popular with website visitors, not to mention social media users as well. Short behind-the-scenes videos shot with an iPhone or Flip camera can be highly effective in giving folks an insider's view into your organization or upcoming event. Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's series called The Loh-Down is a great example of this. If you don't have a camera or the opportunity to film backstage activities, try using a site like Animoto.com to turn your existing photos, video clips, text, and music into a short online video.

4. **Make It Mobile:** More and more people are accessing the web on mobile and tablet devices and arts organizations need to be ready. Making sure that your website is mobile-friendly is incredibly important to provide with an easy and clear way for people to view your site, purchase tickets, and make contributions from a mobile device. If your site is built using open source CMS (Wordpress, Joomla, etc.) there are a variety of plugins that will allow you to make a mobile version of your site quickly and easily. If your site is static HTML or built using a custom CMS, contact your developer and see what options are out there for you regarding mobile. You can also check out InstantEncore.com's new suite of services that include a mobile site (as well as smartphone apps if you are interested in that sort of thing). At the very least, look at your site on a smartphone and a tablet to make sure that the site is at least readable and navigable. One more tip: make sure that your phone number and address is somewhere on the homepage so that people viewing your website on a mobile device while they are trying to find their way to your box office can immediately find that basic information.

5. **Call Them to Action:** It is always a good idea to go through your site and make sure that there are clear and concise calls to action on critical pages such as event landing pages and contribution campaign pages. After all, once someone navigates to the desired page you want to be sure to seal the deal. Take a fresh look at your landing pages and see if there are clear links or buttons to buy tickets or make a contribution.
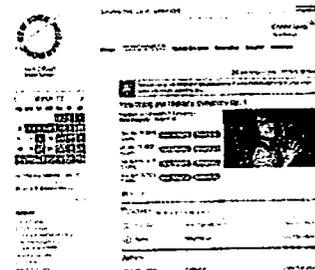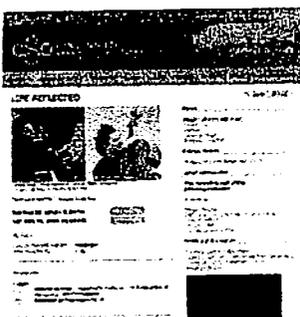
If there aren't on each landing page, add them immediately. It also isn't a bad idea to add a button to buy tickets to the sidebar of each page as well. There should be a quick and easy way to purchase tickets from every page of the site because you never know when the mood will strike!