Essential steps to create a **successful** membership website

Your website is the shop window to your membership organisation. It needs to showcase what you're about, promote the benefits to members, and capture what it means to belong to your community. In a crowded sector of competing membership organisations, your member acquisition and retention could fall short if your shop window (your website) isn't up to scratch.

25

years experience

That's where we come in!

We've developed our essential steps to help you grow, engage and retain members while also saving you time and money. These top tips have been created from our 25+ years' experience of guiding membership organisations and associations through digital transformation.

Focus on your members' needs

Whether or not a member chooses to join your membership organisation boils down to one key factor: what's in it for them. Some will be interested in the structure of your organisation, others may find an affinity with your background and values, but all of them will want to know how becoming a member can benefit their lives, and careers.

That's why having a member-focused approach to your website is vital. It should be structured around their needs and motivations for joining and renewing their membership, with a frictionless member journey that quickly and simply allows them to find the value in your organisation.

Engaging with existing and potential members is also key. Engaged members spend 22% more with their organisations than non-engaged members, according to a recent Gallup study.

So be sure to put your members' experience at the heart of your website design, functionality, structure, and content. Which neatly brings us on to...

Website planning

When it comes to ensuring your members' online experience is at the heart of your design and development, you can't beat website planning and workshops to keep you focused on this goal. Here at Granite 5, our growth-driven design methodology includes workshops with members and staff to get an understanding of the needs, motivations, and behaviours of the different target groups for the membership website.

These collaborative, information-gathering sessions give you insights to plan and develop your membership website in line with both member expectations and organisation goals. Issues discussed include (but aren't limited to):
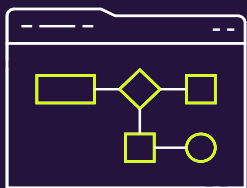
Site structure

Key messaging and positioning

Data flows and processes

Website KPIs and desired organisational outcomes

This information can be used to define the member journey for different types of users during the story mapping process. This ensures the website is tailored to influence their behaviour and place your organisation's core message and values centre stage.

The workshops help to align all the project stakeholders, so everyone is working towards the same vision with a clear idea of the organisation's goals and priorities.

Simplify the user journey

It's a universal truth that if a webpage is too complicated to navigate, people will simply bounce straight off. In fact, research by Microsoft shows that you have just 8 seconds to grab a visitor's attention. So, when it comes to arguably the most important page of your membership website, the joining page, you want it to be easy to navigate.

Consider how you could simplify your joining process by stripping out any irrelevant data fields or unnecessary clicks. Look into streamlining functionality to encourage the visitor towards completion, to make applying for a membership both quick and easy.

Another small change that will make a big difference to your members' experience on your site, is single sign-on. This is another time-saving addition to your website that your members will thank you for.

You have just

8 seconds

to keep your visitor's attention.

Content, content, content

As the timeless saying proclaims, 'Content is king'. Whilst your website design will wow visitors, it's the content that will draw them in and keep them coming back. After all, this content is the medium by which you deliver your key messaging of how you can solve their needs and highlight the inherent value of your membership.

As for what content to include, well, you can base that on the insights gained from your workshops (and data, but we'll come on to that later). The content should be useful, informative, or entertaining to show members the value of investing in your organisation. Plus, during the design process, you can structure the site so that key content is signposted and easy to find.

To encourage repeat visits, be sure to constantly update your content so it's fresh and unique. Think of it as an incentive for visitors to join and members to renew.

Look beyond digital

We're massive advocates of digital transformations here at Granite 5, as you would imagine being a digital agency! However, even we recognise the benefits of looking beyond digital in certain situations.

For example, we wouldn't recommend spending your valuable time and budget creating automated systems for little-used processes, or on your cancellation process. When members want to cancel their membership, if the cancellation process is online there's little to no opportunity to persuade them to stay or understand their reasons for leaving.

By opting for a manual cancellation process, such as a phone line, there's the chance to show the human side of your organisation. By listening to the member's reasons for cancelling you may be able to suggest alternative solutions that could keep them with you for longer. If nothing else, you may have made a valuable learning about something which needs changing or addressing.

Digital transformation

In a fast-changing technological world, embracing new digital ways of thinking and doing can keep you one step ahead of the competition. Forbes recently shared an interesting article on this topic – Top 10 Digital Transformations.

In relation to your membership website, it can involve replacing non-digital processes with digital ones such as:
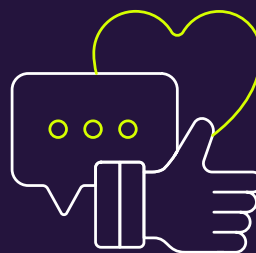
Membership upgrades

Automatic event reminders to reduce no shows

Chat bots to answer FAQ's

Auto-follow ups to increase reviews and feedback

These can all be used to enhance your member journey and help your organisation grow and retain members.

Use a combination of tools and services

To get the best experience, sometimes you must use multiple services. Take the world of entertainment for example. To stay up to date with the latest 'water-cooler moment' TV shows and movies (and avoid the dreaded FOMO) you could argue you need subscriptions to Netflix, Amazon Prime, Disney+, and more.
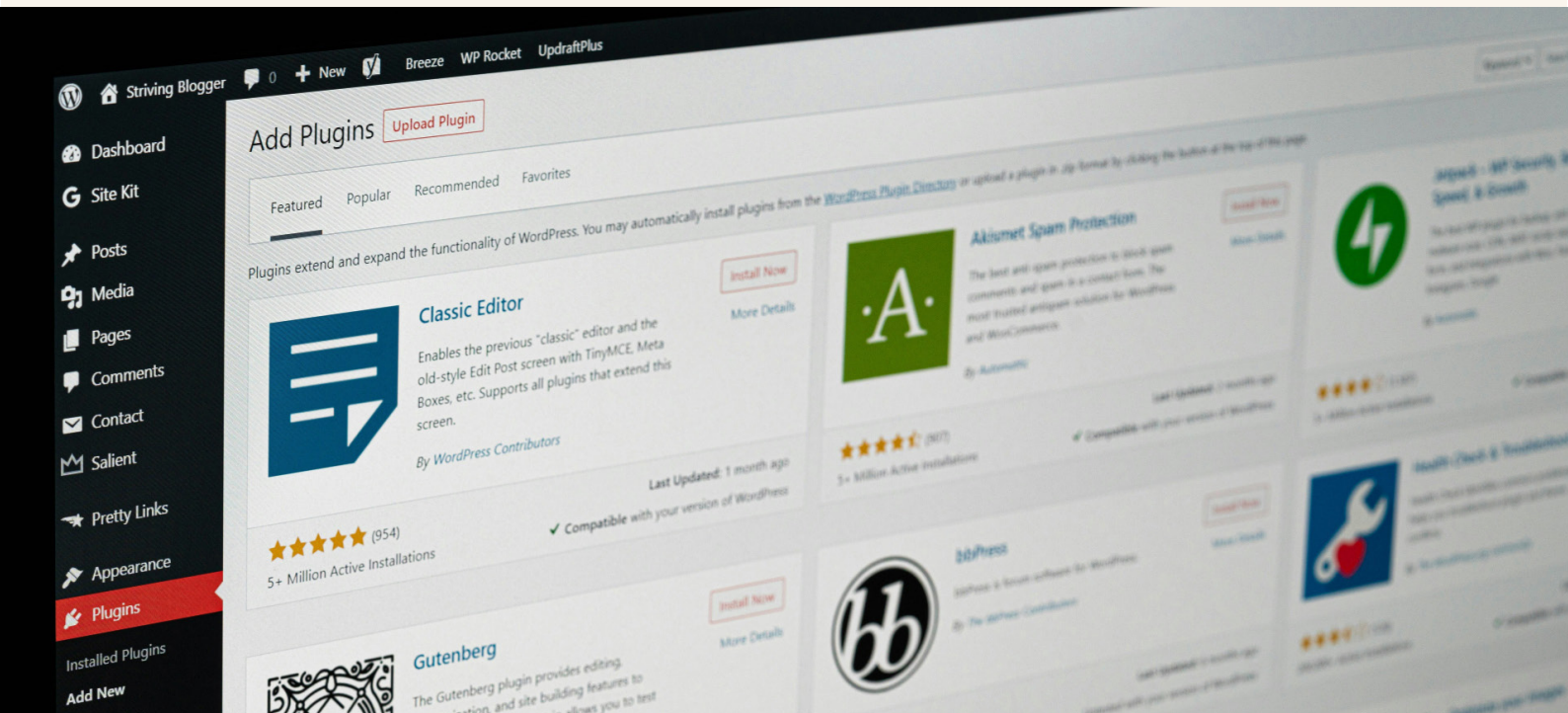
Creating the best experience for your members works in a similar way. The best solution for building an innovative member journey may be to use multiple systems, each designed to be 'best in class' for that service rather than a 'one size fits all' solution that may cover all categories, but specialise in none.

For example, we've built membership websites for clients using the WordPress Content Management System and extended it with leading plug-ins to provide additional features such as a membership portal, gated content, and payments.

Capitalising on existing technology

When you're planning your membership website, there's no need to reinvent the wheel. It may be just as effective, and save you money, to use existing software solutions rather than commission a new bespoke solution.

It may take more time upfront to research the best services and plug-ins for your needs, but once you're up-and-running you'll have more time to focus your attention elsewhere, such as on creating new content to boost member engagement.

Another advantage of utilising existing trusted technology is the reassurance that you're powered and supported by market-leading brands and technology.

Are you using a website software solution?

Can this be used and modified?

Member management system

Do you like saving time and money? We do too! That's why we recommend using a modern cloud-based membership management system that will do exactly that for you. There are many benefits to these systems, but here are our top 5:

1. Security: thanks to state-of-the-art authentication and encrypted access, your organisation and members' information is in safe hands

2. Engagement: the software allows you to select and reward members with special offers to encourage renewal or as a simple thank you

3. Renewals: spend time on other initiatives and let your membership software take care of renewal notices and automatic member renewals

4. Mobile-ready: some systems include mobile apps which keep members engaged by allowing them to control their membership anytime, anywhere and on the device they prefer

5. Digital memberships: they're secure, greener, and easy to track, plus they're much harder to lose than a physical membership card
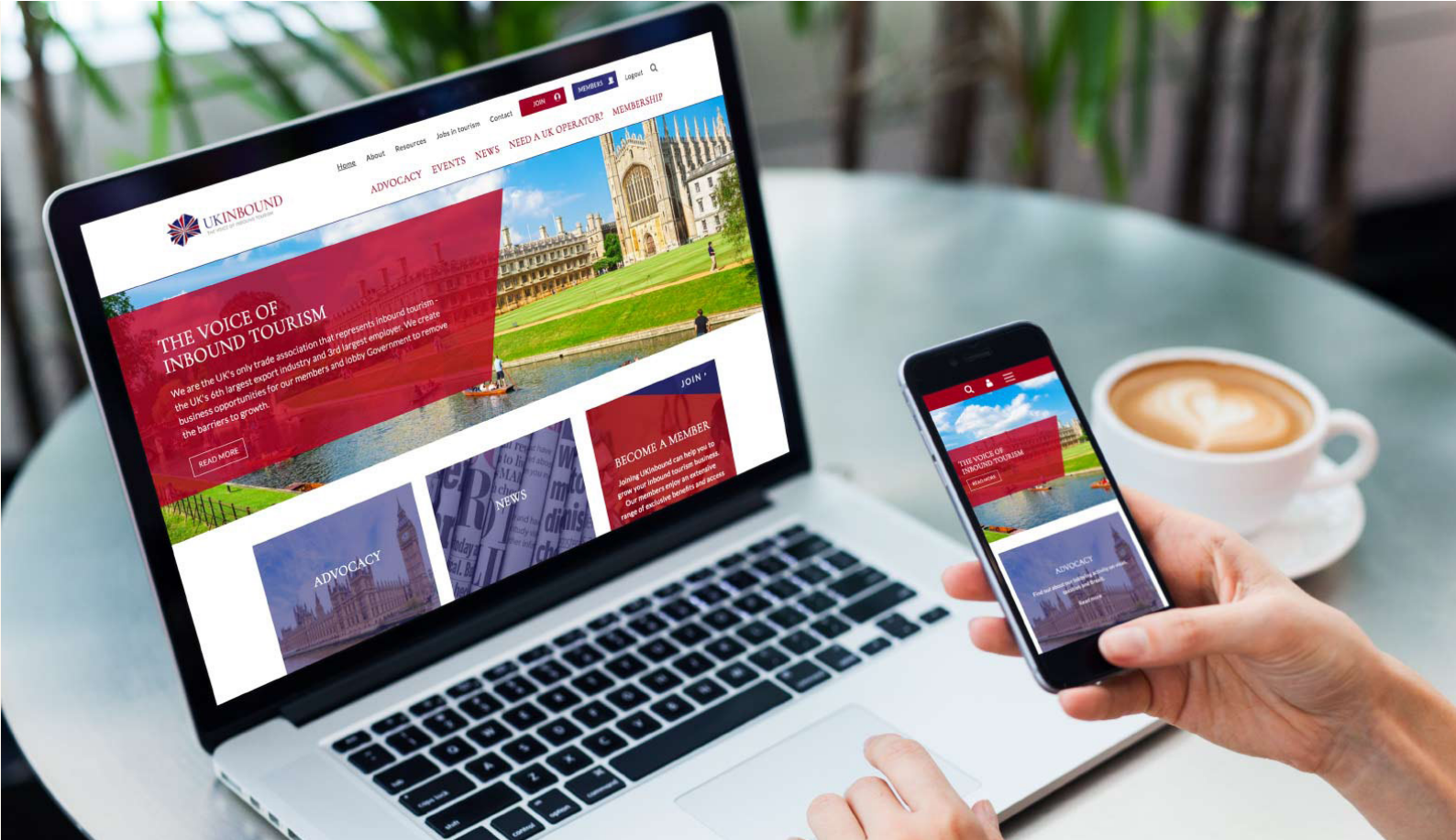
Let actionable data lead decisions

It's never been easier to track your members' behaviour online. Thanks to the likes of Google Analytics, software as a service (SaaS) reporting software, and marketing automation systems, you can wave goodbye to guesswork and monitor what your members are actively interested in. You can then use this data to shape the content you send them to ensure it's relevant and engaging to nurture their interests.

This data will also allow you to directly engage with visitors to your website, with specialised digital marketing campaigns aimed at retaining members and converting new visitors to members. And that is one of the many reasons why they say data is the new gold!

Review and evolve your offering

The needs of your members aren't static, so it's important your membership offering evolves with them. Research their needs (via surveys or social media polls) and come up with innovative content to directly appeal to them. Never assume what worked before will continue to work. That's a recipe for people to get itchy feet and start looking elsewhere.!

25% of existing members

said they wouldn't renew their membership because of a lack of perceived value.

It could be as simple as ensuring all members truly understand the breadth of benefits your organisation provides to them and are fully maximising them. This is especially important as a study found that a quarter of existing members said they wouldn't renew their membership as they felt their organisation offered too little benefit.

So, don't be shy, proudly convey the value of being a member through your content, to help keep retention levels high.

A website is like an employee

Once your membership website has launched and is proving a hit with members, it's easy to think that's the end of the project. In fact, it's just the beginning. Your website should constantly evolve to reflect your ever-changing membership organisation.
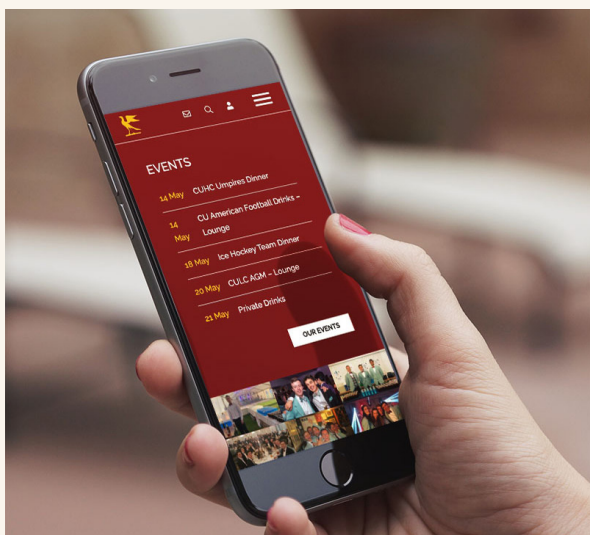
It will never be a finished product because your membership organisation hasn't finished thriving, growing, and evolving. Not only that, the technology is always evolving, design trends are always evolving, and your customer needs are always evolving.

Just take a look at how much Google has changed since it launched in 1998. And the Amazon of today is almost unrecognisable from how it looked way back in 1995. Think of your website as an employee and ensure it's regularly looked after. It's a vital part of your organisation, as we said earlier, it's your shop window. So be sure to keep your window display on-trend and regularly update the content to keep your members engaged.

The launch of your website is the beginning of the journey, not the end.

How Granite 5 can help

If you're about to embark on a website re-design and need further support, then feel free to get in touch.

At Granite 5 we have extensive experience of creating membership websites of all shapes and sizes. No matter what your requirements may be, we're ideally placed to turn your unique opportunities and challenges into a successful membership website.

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The new site can now be used very easily by all members of the internal team as it is so intuitive and therefore requires minimal training. Only one or two members of the team could use the old website due to the amount of time it took to train people up! Our events team report that setting up events on the website has reduced man hours by half as it is so intuitive to use. – **Antonia Stratford, Head of public affairs and communications, UKInbound**

Get in touch

If you're ready to kick off your own project, or would like an initial discovery call to discuss our approach, options, budgets and timescales, please feel free to contact us using the details below.

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