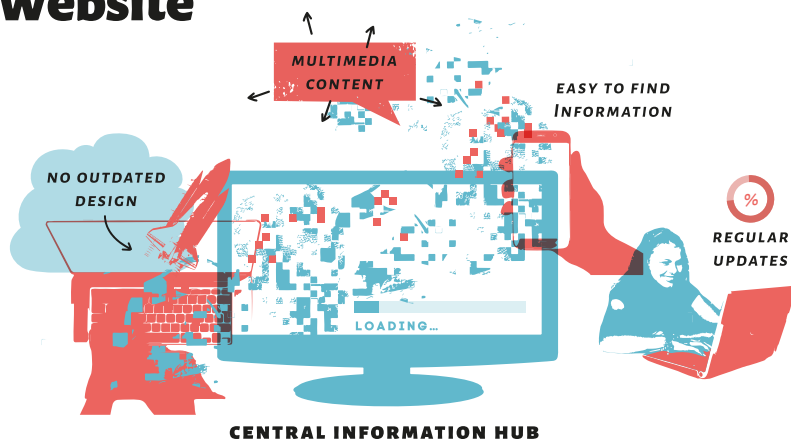


Website



What is the purpose of a website? In most cases, it is a central information hub. In the case of a research institution, it should contain everything from news, videos and infographics, to brochures, contact details and more. While social media has changed the way we use websites – it is often used as a tool to drive people to a website or to engage with audiences – websites continue to hold their ground. If you need information from an organisation, where is the first place you would look, knowing that you are likely to find what you need? Probably the website. Websites are a must for institutions.

But if you want to make a website for a smaller project, always remember: There are billions of websites in the world. Why should anyone look at yours? So a crucial question is: Will you be able to attract people to it? If you need to attract them to your site via social media, how much content will you create? Enough in the long run to create and maintain a following? These are questions you should ask yourself before creating a new website. In some cases, the answer will be: A website is probably not the solution. But there are certainly many good reasons for creating a website.

Websites can seem static – and for certain projects or objectives, this is perfectly fine. But for institutions, it is important to keep them engaging, otherwise why have one in the first place?

A regular flow of new posts and images on the site helps with this. As an added bonus, websites with regular updates are rewarded with better search engine rankings. What else is important? Functionality and design. If the website is frustrating to navigate or hard to read, it will not matter how often new content is added.

This brings us to first impressions: We make assumptions when we see things for the first time. If you don't know an organisation or project, what assumptions will you make if the website looks like it's 20 years old? Probably not good ones. Unless an institution or organisation has a history going back several centuries, with a pantheon of scientific celebrities: How a website looks and feels matters! If a new website looks old-fashioned (e.g. there is no mobile version or the design is outdated), it can harm its reputation. The look and feel of a website should always be kept up to date.

A website is never finished – it should evolve like the organisation or group it represents. This means ongoing maintenance, which costs time and money but is a worthwhile investment.

Functionality is just as important as design. This includes a clear menu and a good search function. As an exercise, try browsing your site as a “persona” – a person with a specific background looking for specific information. Try to do this for all types of visitors you want on your website. Try to map their journey – is it quick or slow, and do they find what they need? Larger institutions usually have a team of people who ensure everything we have covered here is taken care of. For smaller institutions or groups, there are many template options that will allow you to create a nice-looking basic website. Either way, think about what areas you can influence – things as small as keeping contact details up to date or a monthly newsletter can already make a big difference.

