



Creating An Effective Website

Best Practices for Creating an Effective Property Management Website

By Aimee Miller, AppFolio, Inc.

<i>Building the Right Foundation Starts With Your Customers.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Let's Start With a Few Website Basics</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Design and Write For Your Customers</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Less is More – Two Ideas to Keep Your Site Simple (K-Y-S-S).....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Don't Stop At Your Website – Keep On Marketing.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Successful Property Managers Use Their Website as a Competitive Advantage.....</i>	<i>4</i>

A survey of residential property managers showed that 83% of survey respondents expected to add properties and grow their business by >10% this year. How many industries are growing in today's economy? Not many! The survey also found that 44% of respondents felt they are working harder and it is paying off because they are making more money.

It is important to note that just working harder and reducing rents isn't enough in today's economy. Property Managers are looking to the Internet to add more customers, decrease their cost for marketing and find new ways to reach existing customers. The majority (72%) surveyed said they view Internet Marketing as a top business priority and view their website as very important for marketing to both owners and residents.

Bottom Line: A Great Website Will Increase Your Business

Many property management websites are a bit outdated. If you haven't spent the time to update your website, now is the time! This document will cover the best practices to [build an effective website](#) and how to get started so that your fantastic website is found by your target customers.

Building the Right Foundation Starts With Your Customers

The first step is to stop thinking about what you want to "tell" your customers. Instead, think from your customers' point of view: What do they want from you? What are they looking for when they come to your website?

Knowing what your target customers care about will influence how you create your website – the layout, the content and the look and feel.

Action: Take a few moments and think of your customers. Complete the worksheet below.

WHAT DO YOUR CUSTOMERS CARE ABOUT?	
Owners	Residents
1 _____	1 _____
2 _____	2 _____
3 _____	3 _____
4 _____	4 _____
5 _____	5 _____

Let's Start With a Few Website Basics

- 1. People are impatient.** They want to find the information on your website quickly so they scan the page looking for clues.
- 2. Your website must be useful and usable.** The days of fancy, spinning and dancing graphics are over. Think of Google.com – it is super useful and the simplest site you'll find. The first objective is that your customers can find the useful information on your website (and remember, people are impatient!)
- 3. Websites should be designed for the brain's strengths.** Our brains are designed for high speed problem solving. When building websites this means you need:
 - Clear headings, labels and hyperlinks
 - Clearly differentiating buttons and input fields so they stand out
 - Highlight key words or phrases in text that are important

Design and Write for Your Customers

Refer to your worksheet (above) so you remember what your customers care about. The structure of your site should have simple navigation with specific sections for your owners and tenants. Every element of your website should have a purpose – no extras!

Now you need to write your website with lots of consideration for what your customers care about and here are a few ideas.

Owners...

Trust you with their investments: Include testimonials from your current owners and list the associations you belong to – this builds credibility.

Want regular updates: Provide access to an Owners Portal so they can retrieve reports on demand.

Want units filled: Show how you aggressively market properties by posting vacancies to your website, examples of a professional Craigslist.org rental listing and how you post vacancies to the Internet.

Residents...

Want to quickly find available properties: Make the postings attractive filled with photos and very easy to find on your site.

Want to easily contact you: Put your contact information (in text, not an image) directly on the Home Page.

Want you to be easy to work with: Show them how you've worked with other residents, include some happy resident testimonials.

Important Tip: On your homepage, and in text (not an image), be specific on geographic regions served and specialties: "We specialize in renting single family homes in Northwest Portland" or "We specialize in apartments throughout the Bay Area."

Less is More – Two Ideas to Keep Your Site Simple (K-Y-S-S)

Simple Navigation

Your website navigation should be very simple so you are only offering a few choices. We recommend no more than seven. The best for Property Management: Home, About Us, Contact Us, Owners, Residents, Available Rentals.

Easy on the Eyes

Choose a simple color scheme and use it consistently throughout your site. You can find suggestions at www.colourlovers.com. Choose a color palette of no more than 3-4 different colors and make sure your site content is short and to the point...make it easy to read.

Here's What It Looks Like In Action

The screenshot shows the website for Elite Properties, Inc. with several callout boxes pointing to specific features:

- Phone Number Clearly Displayed:** Points to the phone number (805) 555-1234 in the top right header.
- Logo and Branding Is Clear:** Points to the Elite Properties, Inc. logo on the left side of the hero banner.
- Simple Navigation:** Points to the top navigation menu with links: HOME, ABOUT US, OWNERS, TENANTS, FIND A HOME, CONTACT US.
- Clear Offering: Speaks to Both Owners and Tenants:** Points to the main heading "A FOUNDATION BUILT ON EXCELLENCE" and the subtext describing property management services.
- Starting Point to Find Vacancies Easily:** Points to the orange button that says "CLICK HERE TO VIEW HOMES FOR RENT".
- Contact Information Is Accessible:** Points to the "CONTACT US" section in the footer, which lists the address, phone, fax, and email.
- Client Testimonials and Affiliations Build Trust:** Points to the "CLIENT FEEDBACK" section in the footer, which includes a testimonial from John Q., Owner, and logos for NAA and REALTOR.

Don't Stop At Your Website – Keep On Marketing

Your website is the starting point of your marketing efforts. Once you've made connections with your customers it is important to keep building on these relationships. A great starting point is to create quarterly newsletters that you can email to Owners and Residents. You can also post these newsletters to your website which adds more content to your site and will help improve search engine traffic.

Marketing to Owners... a Few Ideas on What to Include in a Newsletter

1. Provide info on the current market trends and conditions. You can talk about area rental rates and sales trends. This builds your credibility as an expert in the market.
2. You can show examples of how aggressively you're marketing properties and what you're doing to differentiate your ads from your competition. Point them back to your website where you have the vacancies beautifully displayed.
3. Provide an update on new technology you're using to save money, get more efficient, enhance communications with residents.
4. Showcase examples of how you're providing outstanding service that helps to retain tenants.

Marketing to Residents... a Few Ideas on What to Include in a Newsletter

1. You can offer valuable coupons: bulk rates for house cleaning services, bulk rates for landscaping services, local restaurant offers with coupons.
2. Help them take advantage of the neighborhood to increase retention. Create a map with suggested walks in the area and also showcase a few of the "best" restaurants.
3. Your newsletter can be a tool to communicate and remind residents of upcoming events – community events or events in your complex.

Now that you have a great website, just kick back and relax...

If only it were that easy! You have to work now to drive traffic back to your website. The easiest (and best) first step is to get your site listed in local search engines, and a great free resource to help you through this process is www.GetListed.org.

Successful Property Managers Use Their Website as a Competitive Advantage

Your website should be a competitive differentiator for your business – it showcases your company values, your professionalism and your commitment to your customers. It is worth your time to create a new site or update your site and you do have a few options:

1. Some property management software solutions, like [AppFolio Property Manager](#) offer websites that are built into the property management software so you can automatically post and un-post vacancies with the click of a button.
2. If you have the time and money and want a very customized site, you can hire a web designer who will work with you design your site from scratch.
3. There are other vendors who offer more generic, template websites for small businesses such as Intuit websites.