u3a Guide

How to guide:

Transforming your website into your shop window

Introduction

This guide is intended for use by your committee and any sub-committee or team that you set up to recruit new members. It is not aimed at the technical side of your website. Its purpose is to suggest how you can transform your website by taking 3 simple steps:

1. Define your website purpose and audience

2. Accentuate the positive

3. Sell your offer

4. Have a "wholistic" approach *(not a spelling mistake)*

5. Improve your visitor experience.

Because it's not technical, we hope this guide will be of use to all u3as (unless you have already transformed your website) whether you are using Site Builder, WordPress, Wild apricot or anything else**.**

We are all feeling our way here and welcome your feedback on how to improve this guide. Please send your ideas for improvement to **feedback@u3a.org.uk**

Website purpose and audience

Broadly speaking your website will have three different types of user:

- Visitors and prospective members

- Existing members who are looking for new opportunities

- Existing members who are looking for news, updates or information.

To transform your website you need to put it in a *selling* mode for visitors and for retaining existing members looking for new opportunities. For these two groups, the primary purpose of the website will be to project your offer in the most attractive way possible and make it easy for someone to sign up for and take advantage of what you are offering.

That doesn't mean that the news and information for existing members will be ignored. But when you think about it, they will almost certainly be able to access news, information and updates in other ways: through your newsletter, from communications from your committee and from interest groups to which they belong. This means that your website does not need to have information updates as its *primary* goal.

Accentuate the positive!!!

This has three exclamation marks because a surprising number of u3a websites have the following message on their website, often in a very prominent position:

Because of the Pandemic all meetings are suspended until further notice.

A variation of this message is: In "normal" times our monthly **General Meeting** gives you the opportunity to meet new friends…….. and join Interest Groups. ***(but currently suspended during the Covid outbreak)*** [my emphasis].

Both examples imply that their audience is <u>current</u> members looking for information. They are inappropriate if the primary purpose of your website is to sell your u3a to <u>prospective</u> members.

At the risk of stating the obvious, **accentuating the positive** means focussing on and emphasizing all that your u3a currently offers – your newsletter; your online, face-to-face and *hybrid* interest groups which ARE functioning; the new friendships, activities and experiences you offer; not to forget your **online** monthly meeting. This is particularly important on your home and welcome pages.

There are many u3a websites which do this: here is Chepstow u3a's home page

The top of their welcome page is shown below:

![u3a Guide logo]

The positive messages are included and embodied in:

- The buttons on top of the page which include New Normal and Virtual u3a
- The <u>Live Life to the Full</u> banner heading
- The encouraging message which follows emphasizing the benefits of joining the u3a
- The active and attractive photographs which can be blown up to full size
- The list of interest groups.

The bottom of the welcome page contains more attractive images and stirring endorsements from some new members. The page concludes with four key links. Three of the links are to parts of the Chepstow offer which might be particularly attractive to prospective members: newsletter, Tuesday live fortnightly virtual meetings, and social events. The fourth key link is to …………**the membership page**.
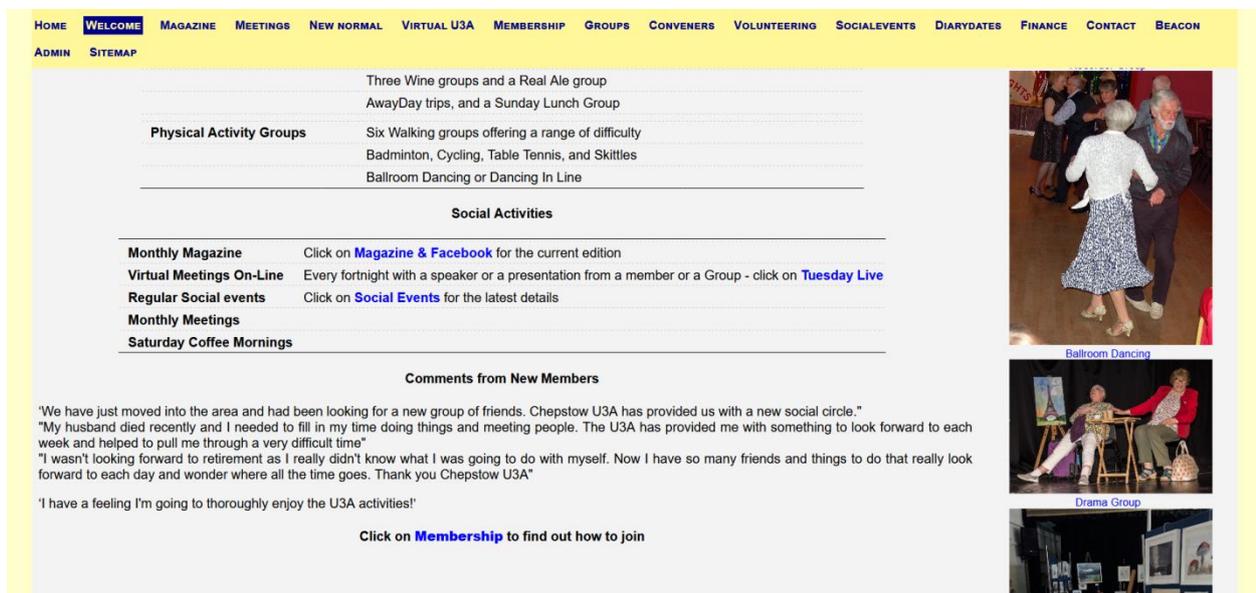
We don't say that everybody should copy Chepstow, but their example shows how you can accentuate the positive and squeeze out the negative.

Sell your offer

At the risk of echoing the saying: '*Grandmothers, pick up those eggs and suck!*', here follow some thoughts about selling. We all know at least in principle that we sell *benefits* and not *features.* But what does this mean in practice and how do you combine selling benefits with essential descriptive information? Our suggestions are:

- Sell the benefits of everything you do – newsletter, friendship, activities, technical support, welcome arrangements, etc
- Balance benefits and information. Give as much prominence to what people get out of joining your online meetings or a particular interest group (what this interest group will do for you), as to the necessary information to describe the meeting or group.

- Arrange pages so that the things most interesting to prospective new members (and indeed members) come first and put Admin, Beacon at the end

- Once you've got it, flaunt it! Your website address should be on every piece of promotional material: newsletter, welcome booklet, posters, flyers, banners, every Facebook post

- Don't put too much detailed information about groups in the main body of the website; leave that for the Group pages.

- Try to sell a flavour of what it means to be a member

- People respond more to images than text. Do the images you are using on your website underscore and reinforce the benefits you are promoting? When you are choosing pictures for the website try to cover as many genres as possible, showing the range of activities. Do you show a wide range of ages? Are you promoting both strenuous activities and more cerebral activities?

- People respond even more to video than to images: do you have any links to very short video clips you may have produced yourself? Are there very short u3a clips produced by others on YouTube to which you want to post links?

There is a separate guide in the Recruitment Toolkit about making your interest group offer irresistible as well.

Have a "wholistic" approach

I know that's not how you spell holistic, but I am making a different point. If you are selling benefits, you probably need an holistic approach combining image, text, style etc. The point here is that you need to consider your website *as a whole*.

Your website may have dozens, scores or even hundreds of pages. Most of your pages will probably be devoted to your interest groups. Now, you will almost certainly have updated some key pages and added a few more on the Covid situation, how to enrol on line, risk assessment advice etc, but what have you done about all your interest group pages?

If you google the name of your town and say, the term gardening or gardening group, chances are that Google will turn up a link to your u3a gardening group on its first page of results. The more specialised your group, the more likely it will appear on the first page of your Google results. If I google *Gedling bonsai*, there are six links on the first page of my Google results and ironically, they are listed above the local bonsai nursery.

This is both good and bad news. It's good in the sense that it shows you how relatively easily prospective new members can find you when they are seeking to pursue an interest, even though they may never have heard of u3a in general and your u3a in particular. The bad news is that you will probably need to inspire, persuade, enjoin, and enthuse your interest group convenors to update their web page(s) with text and images that are current and which sell their interest group.

If you do not enable current group convenors to manage their own interest group pages, now is the opportunity to provide access and give any necessary training – reminding them that someone <u>within their group</u> could take on this responsibility if they cannot/do not want to do it themselves.

Improve your visitor experience

The most important thing to improve visitor experience is to work on the look and ease of use of the website. You have probably done quite a lot to make your website interesting and enjoyable if you have followed some of the suggestions above.

Final check questions:

- **Does your website do what you want it to?**
- **Do the links all work?**
- **Is your website content attractive and up to date?**
- **Do all your contact points work?**

There is a complementary guide in the Recruitment Toolkit on ***Getting website and social media traffic and keeping it ,*** which recommends ways of increasing visitor numbers to your website.

And finally: Getting a positive result

From your point of view, this will be the enrolment of a new member or at least an enquiry about joining your u3a. Apart from the obvious need to have a well-signposted means of enrolling online or of enquiring about membership, the way you respond to first contacts is probably as critical to a positive result as the content and design of your website.

This topic is explored more fully in another guide in the Toolkit: ***Enrolling and welcoming new members online***.

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With assistance from Chepstow u3a.
(Errors which remain are all mine!)