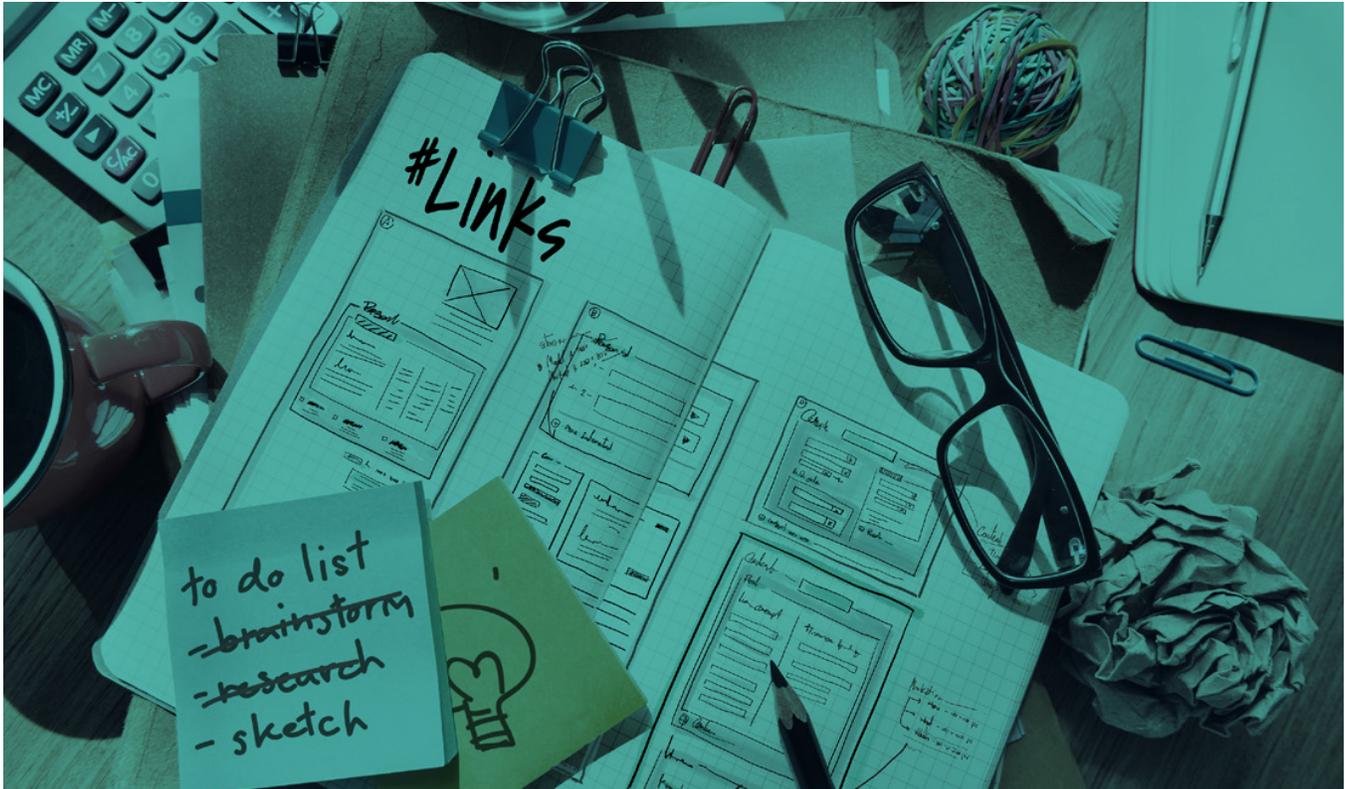


# A Fresh Look at Websites

Article by Roxanne Hawn



## What's hot, what's not now?

Have you revisited your website's purpose, functionality and style lately? Have you ever removed any content? Or have you simply been adding to it all this time? Does your site now resemble Frankenstein?

## Where do things stand?

Start the process of taking a fresh look at your website by sketching out a sitemap, if you don't already have one. A sitemap simply shows you how your content currently connects. Sitemaps can resemble an organizational chart, if you're a visual thinker. Sitemaps can also look like an outline, if that makes more sense to you.

If you already know that your web content needs to be reorganized or simplified, consider using sticky-notes or index cards to represent each page of your site. Lay out the notes or cards as your site currently exists. Take a photo of it for reference. Then move things around, if you decide to make changes. Hint: You probably *should* make changes.

## What's missing?

Ask yourself how prospective clients and/or current clients use your site. Do they simply need barebones information about your practice and your team? Or do you want them to engage with your site regularly through things such as pet health education articles or a robust portal for client activities that includes appointment making, reordering or exchanging messages with veterinarians?

Don't just look at big things like a portal or photos. Pay attention to tiny things too. I cannot tell you how many veterinary sites don't make the phone number and address as obvious visually as they should, and not just on the so-called home page.

## What's out of date?

Comb through your web content for any wildly outdated information. The most obvious example is biographies of veterinarians and staff, especially people no longer at the

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## Looking to the Future!

When we asked Kristina Mausser, president and co-owner of Kina'ole Inc., a management consulting company that specializes in digital strategies, about what's ahead with websites and digital marketing, she named these futuristic-sounding developments:

- Web design done by artificial intelligence.
- Client and patient services via digital devices such as wearable tech, Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, and Google's Google Assistant. The human medical field is already looking at patient services like this.

Mausser says, "With these technologies, we have to approach design from a much broader perspective as we set about designing conversational experiences rather than just web pages. Without a screen to think about, it is all about developing information and content to align with the day-to-day routines of the people accessing it. For this reason, thinking more broadly about a customer's journey and potential touch-points for an interaction with your company is something a business can start thinking about today in order to prepare for these new ways of delivering service in the future."

practice. If you haven't freshened up your current staffs' bios in a while, make those a little more relevant.

If you have resources on your site that you're no longer adding to regularly, consider creating an archive section to the site so that it doesn't bog down the site areas you are now giving more effort.

### Client expectations and user experience

Kristina Mausser, president and co-owner of Kina'ole Inc., a management consulting company that specializes in digital strategies, monitors and helps clients adapt to consumers' changing expectations. She explains, "I think the biggest thing we've seen over the last five years that has really influenced website design has been the shift away from desktop computers to mobile devices. Most recent figures

indicate 75 percent of internet use is through a mobile device and that certainly changes the dynamic of what companies can convey on a small screen."

The term for sites that work for desktop and various mobile devices (smart phones, tablets, etc.) is "responsive." That means the site recognizes which device a person is using and provides a version of the site that works best for that device—often a simpler version for small devices.

Rather than scale down sites for mobile users, many websites are now natively built for mobile then scaled up for desktop users, if necessary. That's a real shift since early responsive designs did the opposite.

Mausser points out that consumers also expect quick and effective responses. "As an extension of this [increased use of mobile devices], we're also seeing consumers' expectations for customer service beyond face-to-face interactions increasing," she says. "From customizable apps to text reminders, all of these are simply viewed as an extension of a great customer experience with a company."

In some cases, for some smaller companies, Mausser says, "This focus on 'digital customer service' might have them forego a website altogether in favor of an easy-to-update and more conversation-friendly Facebook page instead."

### Hot website design trends

It's important to ask and answer all the big questions about your website's purpose and vital content *before* picking a new design. I know it's more fun to focus on how the site looks, but you need a strong foundation of strategy and function first.

The good news, says Mausser, is that the old barriers to web design have fallen in the wake of easy-to-use web tools that use drag-and-drop technology. Check out Wix, SquareSpace and PageCloud to see what's out there today.

"You don't have to invest a lot of money into developing or updating your website anymore," she says. "That's not to say that excellent design and customized branding aren't important, but for many small businesses a professional-looking business card page can be set up quickly and without a lot of upfront investment or technical know-how."

## So, what's hot in web design today?

Mary Makowsky of Max Media Solutions outlines these trends in web design:

- Larger fonts
- More open page layouts
- Super simple home pages

"A convenient, efficient online appointment system is a big plus," she adds.

The biggest trend with no signs of slowing down is something called "parallax" design. Makowsky explains that parallax is "where some elements on the web page move at a different rate of speed or in a different direction than others when scrolling."

"Parallax is getting more sophisticated and realistic," she says. "However, for most small businesses, I think a subtle use of parallax makes more sense. A simple parallax effect can create nice depth and movement without distracting from the message."

Makowsky says that background video is another way to create movement on a site. "A short, looped video of hospital staff interacting with clients and pets would be a 'humanizing' touch while also giving a sense of place," she says.

So, what's old, dead and old-fashioned when it comes to web design? Makowsky recommends getting rid of rotating photo or text carousels or sliders since most people don't see past the first one anyway. "At the very least, carousels should not be used to convey information that's vital to presenting the brand or offerings," she says.

## What about SEO?

Search engine optimization is key to website performance, if you want your site to attract new clients who search online for veterinarian + name of your city. Most of the success in search comes from using the proper keywords, including location, to your page URLs, meta titles and meta descriptions.

However, for highly competitive keywords, some businesses (of all sizes) now create content clusters on hot topics in their profession. For example, if your practice is certified as a cat-friendly practice, then you may want to create deep and informative content on several pages (not just one) that share important feline care information. Often these

content clusters start with phrases people use in search engines. Anything that starts as a question like, "Can I give my cat ...?" would perform well, if you created pages that answer those commonly searched questions about cats.

So, if you're looking to build the perception of expertise in a certain area of veterinary medicine, then content marketing through online content clusters can be a great way to do that with people and search engines.

## Pace yourself

Ask yourself: Do I want or need my site to do more than serve as an online advertisement whose only purpose is to spur contact via phone, email, text message or social media?

If not, rather than keeping and overhauling what you've added over the years, why not start fresh with a super simple site? Redesigning without a long list of pages is much easier.

That doesn't mean that a deep and robust site is a bad idea. For many practices, it's still a rock-solid strategy to create and maintain a site as a client education resource.



Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader's Digest, Natural Home, Bankrate.com, WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets. Her first book is called *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*.

## Related Reading

### Popular Website Creation Tools

[Wix.com](http://Wix.com)

[Squarespace.com](http://Squarespace.com)

[Pagecloud.com](http://Pagecloud.com)

[Wordpress.org](http://Wordpress.org)

### Top Web Design Trends to Watch in 2017

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