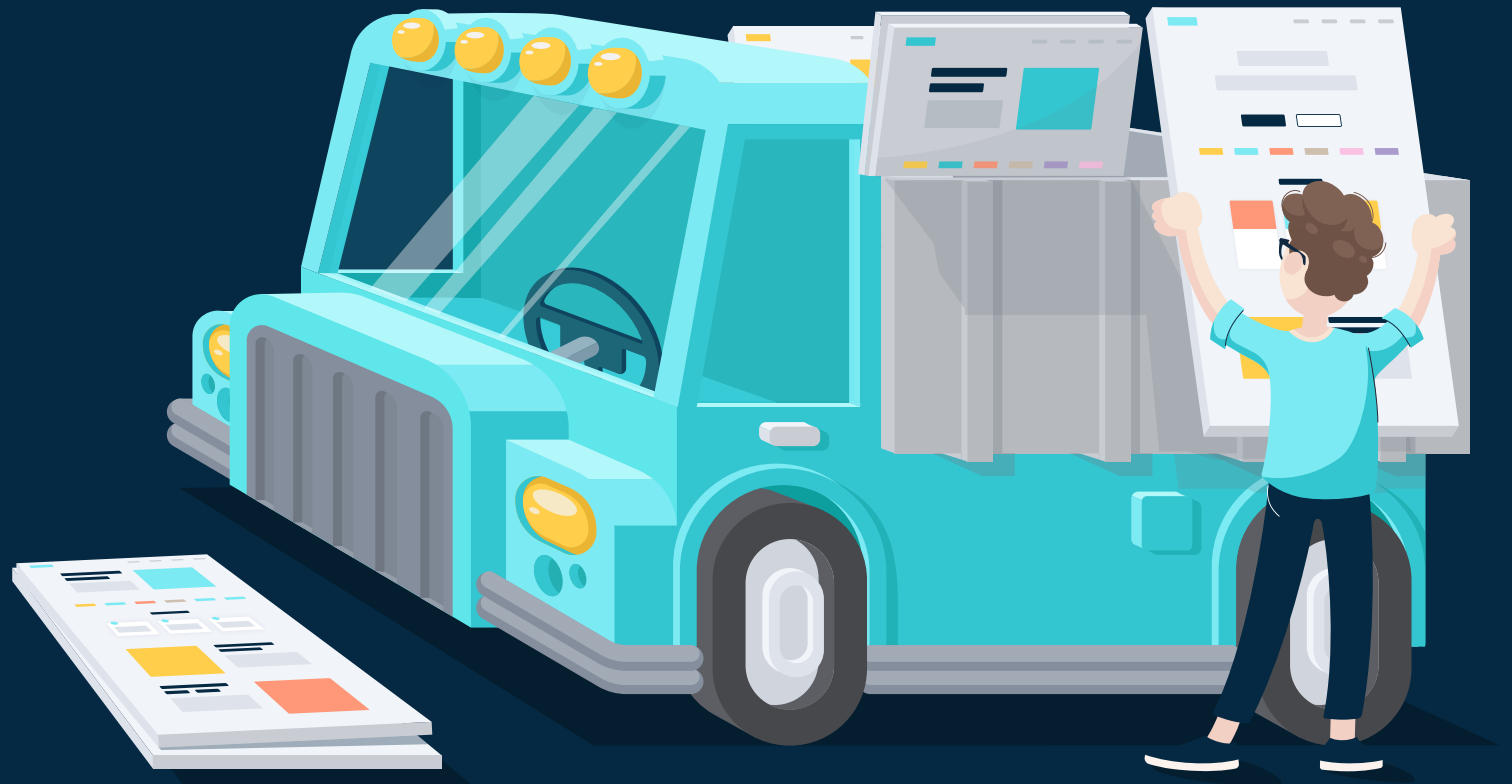# Web Governance Handbook

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About Monsido

Monsido is a fast-growing software company founded in 2014 that provides a one-stop web governance solution designed to give website visitors a superior browsing experience. Our time-saving auditing tool provides accurate and insightful information that helps organizations work with confidence to identify accessibility and quality assurance issues. This enables them to optimize their online presence and ensure compliance with legal requirements. Monsido has offices in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Denmark. For more information, visit **www.monsido.com**

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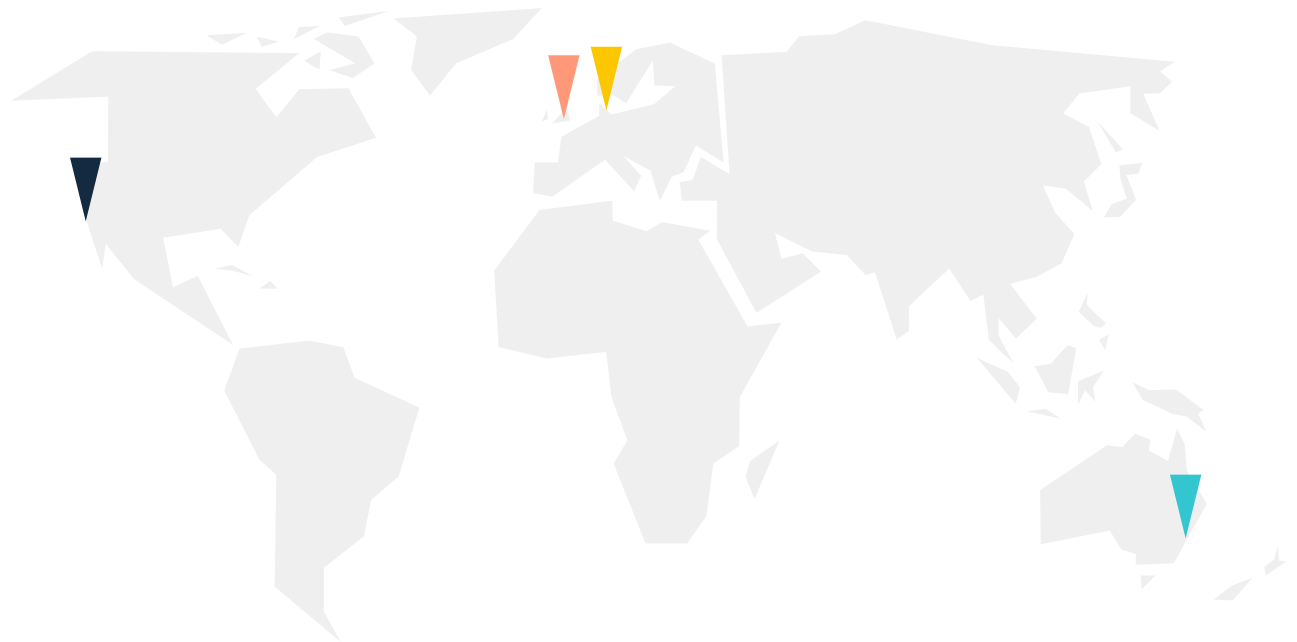Surry Hills, NSW 2010, Australia
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Introduction

Web governance - a stuffy term for a rather important subject.

Despite its dry title, web governance is extremely important in website development and management as it is both the framework and the core of all website activities. **So, if you have a website, you need web governance.**

We hope that you will find this guide a helpful resource to be used alongside the Monsido web governance and accessibility tool. Remember, there is no better time to get started with governance than now. If you need any assistance using Monsido to improve your website, our team is here for you.

Now let's begin!

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What Is Web Governance?

Web governance is best defined as all of the policies and procedures which go into maintaining and managing a website. It functions as a framework that grants decision-making authority, assigns roles, and establishes accountability for the overall digital presence of an organization. Having a set of rules and practices in place allows digital teams to manage websites and other digital assets and content in a controlled and orderly way. In fact, every website has some form of web governance in place, whether the owners realize it or not.

Ideally, a proper web governance model should also define the roles and responsibilities for managing both the content and functionality of a website. This begins with the conception of the site and carries through to its implementation and everything beyond. Advanced long-term planning of the entire digital strategy aids in ensuring the ultimate success of the website. This is particularly advantageous for organizations with limited resources.

The stability provided by good web governance allows organizations to look to the horizon for emerging opportunities. As digital teams and web content grows, clearly defined roles and responsibilities keep everyone moving forward together.
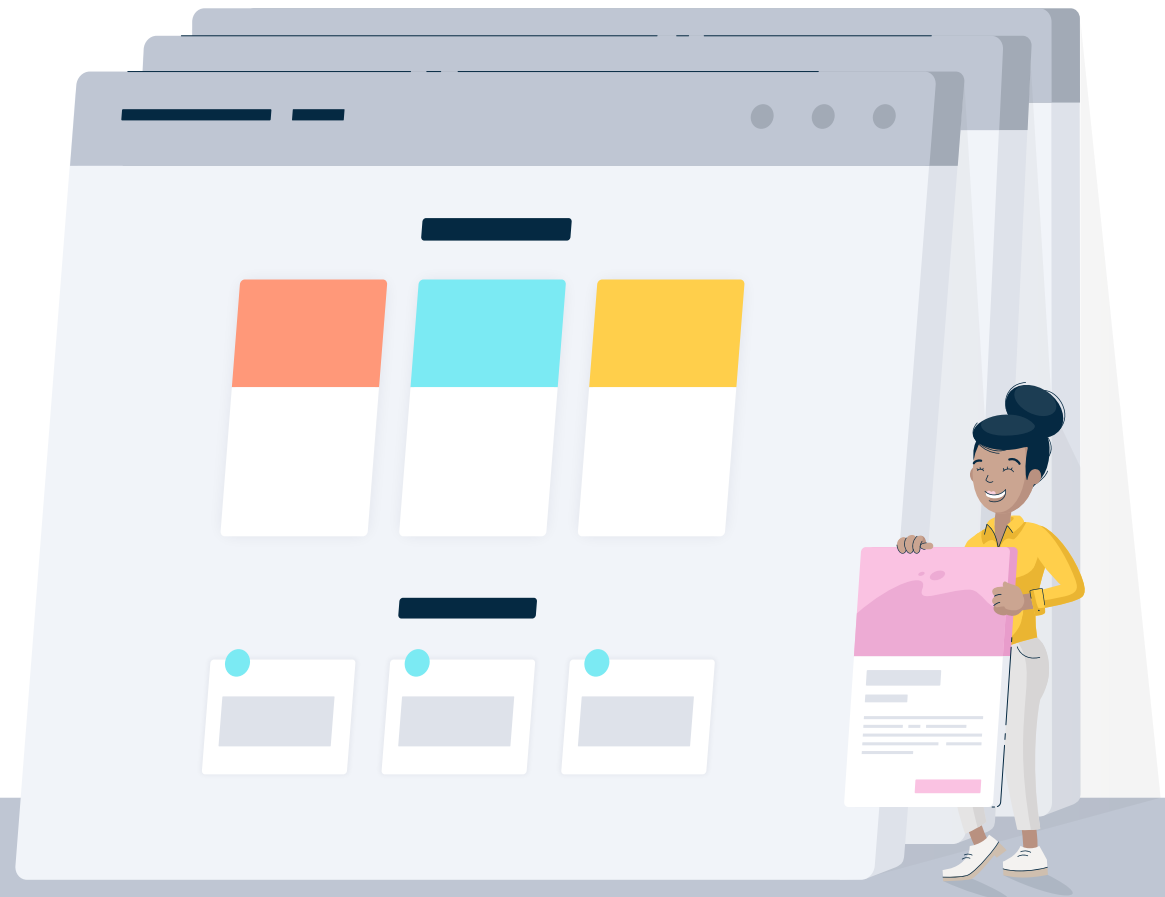
Who Needs Web Governance?

The short answer is everyone. Everyone with a website regardless of size needs web governance, though not all web governance systems are identical or equal. The larger the organization, the more imperative it is to have a clear, supervised web governance system in place. The greatest challenge in web governance is trying to create order in massive digital presences with high complexity and an immense scale of online operations and domains.

Web governance is also required of small organizations and websites, but they face less obstacles in regard to controlling web channels, website content, and the teams responsible for them because of their smaller scale. Furthermore, web governance must always be in a position to respond as new technology brings with them their own set of issues. In the beginning, it was enough to have a website to introduce the world to an organization. However, as the digital universe has continued to expand, organizations have been forced to spend resources to add and maintain channels, like social media, or technology, like videos on a website, in order to engage their desired audience.

What are the Benefits
Of Good Web Governance?

Structure

Good web governance results in improved consistency and stability within digital operations as web teams work in coordination without the confusion as to who plays what role. It is important to note that web governance guides the management of a site and implements a direction for web teams. To ensure consistency, policies, processes, and standards must be established. With this comes clearer roles for web team members which will result in fewer inconsistencies in output. We will explore these three elements later on in this handbook.

Unity and Consistency

A web team is made out of many different individuals, so a conflict of ideas and concepts is bound to occur. But with a good governance plan in place, clear policies and procedures can help keep your web team on the same page. This is especially important in terms of content production and website optimization. The larger an organization or institution, the more moving pieces and parts to the development and maintenance of the website. This creates

problems because of the need for organizations and institutions to speak in one unified voice across all channels. If left unchecked, conflicting messaging can undercut the credibility of the institution or organization and damage its reputation. Issues like incorrect information can also slip through the cracks, resulting in severe consequences like legal issues and customer dissatisfaction.

Having a unified theme across the organization will help your team work together in one voice to strengthen brand identity and reputation. Things like Search Engine Optimization (SEO) best practices, readability, and accessibility can be kept in check across the board. Everyone will be working towards the same level of quality for the site and the content will be produced in a unified style. This extends to the use of freelancers or independent contractors. Your established standard of quality and style can be something to guide the work of external contractors and will allow you to distribute workflow in a reliable and consistent manner.

Prevents Content Clutter and Hoarding

In today's increasingly digitally-driven world, an organization's website has become the very encapsulation of its identity. Content on sites continue to grow exponentially every day and organizations that don't have methods in place to curate and organize them run the risk of losing control of their digital assets. They essentially become digital hoarders, losing track of massive volumes of content across pages and domains. Old, irrelevant content is unintentionally retained, cluttering up the site.

The negative ramifications of this sort of hoarding include a diluted brand image from the outdated content, and broken links, incorrect content, poor website navigation and more - all of which can lead to reputational damage. Therefore, it's essential for organizations to determine how they manage content audits and how they want to archive and store older content as part of their web governance strategy. After all, a chaotic, negative user experience means less time spent on your website and little likelihood of a repeat visit.

Improves SEO

With stability amongst the digital team and goals to work towards comes a well functioning site. Good SEO comes from good governance, resulting in a higher position in organic search results. Consistent processes, standards, and policies for SEO auditing and improvement can ensure that you avoid any errors that could damage search rankings and can help your team stay on top of your optimization activities.

Competitive Leverage

Effective web governance creates the opportunity to scan the horizon for new opportunities or to watch for potential pitfalls. Without a doubt, good web governance conveys a competitive advantage over sites that lack it.

Sets Goals

Just as the number of web channels of a single organization grows, so too has the need to be able to manage the organization's web presence and content on a growing number of media and devices. Because of its role in organizing your web content, proper web governance allows your teams to operate more efficiently. It ensures that all website managers, designers, developers, and content creators can create a structure for content management and set scalable goals for the website to accommodate content growth from the beginning.

Improves UX

Control over your site can have a profound impact on your visitors' user experience. Having consistent standards and processes in place results in better execution of website tasks and content delivery, and more credibility for your organization. This, in turn, can result in more time spent on your website to impart your message, leading to lower bounce rates and higher conversions. Web governance also helps reduce errors on your site and improves accessibility, regardless of whether your site spans across different domains or if it only has two pages. It ensures that you keep your content delivery at a certain standard and quality and that your voice and tone across the board is consistent to retain a strong brand identity. Even the tiniest of mistakes like a broken link can create a negative user experience that can tarnish your reputation.

Encourages Proactive Management

As mentioned, with good web governance comes more structure in the contributions within digital teams and more flexible management of a website. Having clear responsibilities in digital teams can help each team member take control of their tasks and be more proactive towards improving the site and optimizing it to its fullest potential. This replaces merely reacting to stakeholder pressure, external trends, and website issues like bugs, poor user experience, and errors.

Ultimately, web governance is about creating a framework that allows the various aspects of your web presence to operate in sync for the good of your organization. Digital governance pioneer Lisa Welchman uses the metaphor of an orchestra[1] to illustrate web governance. The sheet music serves as a guide, outlining what notes to play, while the conductor manages the musicians to keep them playing in harmony together. As the size of the group of musicians grows, it will require more structure and guidance to stay in tune. Imagine the chaos and discordant noise if you didn't have the sheet music and conductor in place, but instead, every musician just did his or her own thing.

[1]Digital Governance: A Primer for Content Marketers.

https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/CMI_ebook_governance_final_Nov.pdf

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What is the Difference Between Web Management and Web Governance?

A common misconception is that web governance is synonymous with web management. While the two concepts might appear to be similar, web management and web governance are two separate but related entities.

Web management can be seen as the various tasks involved in operating a website including managing the various elements that go into creating content and optimizing a site, whereas web governance is the overarching system that defines how that management should be done. To put it simply, web management is responsible for running things and web governance is there to keep it running in the right direction.

Depending on the size of your company or organization, the same person or team might be responsible for both management and governance. In those cases, it's essential to make the distinction between the two in order to achieve the best outcomes. While web management focuses on the immediate tasks at hand, web governance also involves looking out for the next big thing or idea.

Good web governance, when executed by effective web management, is essential to the creation and maintenance of a successful site, besides providing a positive user experience. A website full of errors, outdated information, and broken links will automatically diminish your organization to visitors and undercut your credibility.

What Does Good
Web Governance Look Like?

Good web governance begins with having a digital strategy that determines your organization's direction. An organization's web governance structure should guide the day-to-day management of digital content and channels and clearly identify who does what in relation to digital assets. Web governance should function as a steward, providing both consistency and a measure of control. It creates a framework by giving them the tools they need, along with providing the necessary permissions and standards, as well as oversight and accountability. When properly executed, web governance enables your team to be more productive, defines roles, eliminates redundancies, and also improves the user experience of your website. The larger the organization, the greater the need for careful planning and delegation of responsibilities.

All web governance systems are not created equal. Whether or not a web governance system will work depends on three key factors.

> First of all, the organization must have a vision for web governance and be willing to do what it takes to make it work in terms of organization and resources

> Next, the web governance team must be empowered to maintain the balance required to remain consistent in quality as the scale of the organization's web presence expands

> Finally, it is necessary to involve the rest of the web team in the change. Encourage them to practice web management and maintenance by offering the training or tools they need to succeed.

The Components
of Web Governance

At the core of every web governance system lies these three components: **Activities, Resources, and Scale[2].**

Activities

These are the activities that need to be executed for a website to function:

> **Development** - the building up of your website and all its features

> **Maintenance** - the tasks involved to ensure your website runs smoothly

> **Infrastructure** - the upkeep of hosting accounts, content management systems, servers, etc.

> **Leadership** - the supervision required to strategize, organize, and supervise the successful execution of these activities

Resources

Important resources for executing the activities on your website include:

> **People** - the employees that will perform the web activities mentioned above, as well as freelancers or consultants that are involved

> **Tools** - any products or services required to carry out the activities

> **Budget** - the costs allocated to acquire the necessary products, services, and people

> **Processes** - the detailed procedures that the people involved will have to abide by to ensure the successful execution of the activities

These four resources are not a prerequisite for success. You can eliminate one or another based on your own organizational situation and focus. For example, you can focus your resources on automated tools to optimize your site if you are unable to bring in more people on your team due to budget constraints.

Scale

Scale is a concept that helps decide how to balance activities and resources into a functioning system based on the site's size, traffic, and technical complexity. Larger and more complex sites will require more complex activities and resources to support its operations as compared to smaller sites. In turn, small sites with a high traffic volume or complex UI may require heavy and specialized activities and resources.

How to Build and Implement a Web Governance Strategy

1. Set Realistic Goals

Once you have a clear idea of the specific activities and resources needed for your website as well as a good understanding of how to scale them to your site, you'll need to conduct an overall website audit. This will allow you to gain a full understanding of the state of your site and examine metrics like traffic or bounce rate, to determine if there are any areas that are underperforming or have errors. You should also do some thorough competitive research to scope out other sites in the same field to see what you might be missing. This will help you and your web team prioritize activities and set realistic goals for governance and growth.

2. Define Roles

With goals in place, the next step is to determine who will be involved in the planning, design, content creation, publication, testing, and overall maintenance of your site. This involves a clear definition of leadership roles and activities and the assignment of tasks to the right people on your team or to freelancers. By defining roles and responsibilities, you can prevent issues

like overlap of tasks, neglected tasks, or redundant jobs that can cause website errors, confusion, and inevitably lead to frustration. Some examples of important roles in a web team include:

> Web administrators / webmasters
> Content creators
> Web editors
> Developers
> Information architects
> Accessibility specialists
> SEO specialists
> UX designers
> QA testers

These roles and responsibilities will depend on the size and scale of your site. Some larger organizations will have the resources to add more web team members and managers to oversee them in a bid to create a web governance strategy and execute it effectively[3].

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[2]Activities, Resources & Scale: Governance 101. http://www.diffily.com/articles/webgovernance101.htm

[3]Roles & Responsibilities on a Web Team. http://www.diffily.com/articles/webteamroles.htm

3. Establish Policies, Standards, and Procedures

Building a web governance strategy requires the establishment and documentation of three primary areas: **Policies, Standards, and Processes.**

Policies

Policies are the guidelines that must be followed for all digital properties on the website. They should be clear, concise, and kept to a minimum to be most effective. Avoid changing policies unless absolutely necessary. By nature, policies become entrenched behavior, which can be difficult to alter when guidelines change.

Examples of Policies:

> All content published on the website must follow AP style guidelines

> All visual imagery on the website must follow corporate visual brand and style guidelines

> All pages on the website must contain a link to login to the customer dashboard

> All pages must have a link to the organization's accessibility statement

Standards

Standards are created to deliver consistency in quality, voice, and design. Since copywriters, designers, and stakeholders all have unique styles and skills, proper web governance standards ensure they all follow the same criteria across the website.

Examples of Standards:

> Readability level - aiming for a Flesch readability score of 60.0–50.0

> Accessibility - aiming to comply with the WCAG 2.0 level AA

> Industry regulations - adhering to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

Processes

This includes all of the steps that must be taken to be sure your website adheres to your policies and standards. For example, you might make a checklist of processes that go into the production of content, such as optimizing URLs, sizing images, adding Title and H1 Tags, and meta descriptions. Scheduling is also a big part of web governance processes. Depending on your budget and resources, you will probably need to employ multiple tools to both aid the execution of processes and maintain web content such as a content management system (Wordpress, Joomla, etc.), publishing tools (SproutSocial, Buffer, Hootsuite, etc.), or optimization tools (Monsido).

Examples of Processes:

> Sending all blog post drafts to the Content Manager for review and approval before publishing.

> Conducting a weekly site audit for broken links every Monday.

> Checking each new webpage for URL slug, title tags, H1 tags, and meta descriptions before publishing.

> All PDFs that are to be shared on the website must be sent for approval to the Marketing Manager and submitted for accessibility remediation.

4. Regularly Monitor and Maintain Your Site

Establishing a web governance strategy isn't a one-off project. Web governance should be flexible to accommodate the evolution of your website. Once a strategy has been built and the tasks deployed, your team should be regularly reviewing and improving your site for performance, updates, and elimination of errors.

The core of web governance is to ensure that you have the framework for maintaining your site at the highest standards possible. Daily monitoring of your website is ideal to ensure that your site is running smoothly and is performing well.

This can be quite taxing on resources for some organizations so most benefit greatly from outsourcing or employing more cost efficient automated solutions. Web governance tools can assist with managing team members and roles, spotting errors, managing SEO, and improving accessibility.

Elements of
Web Governance

These are the elements of web governance that are crucial to the success of a site. With content management systems (CMS) making it easier now to just add content to sites, web teams have to be vigilant in ensuring that there are processes in place to control the chaos and prevent non-compliance by keeping these elements in check.

Accessibility

Web accessibility means that your website, and everything on it, can be used by anyone regardless of ability. Many people assume accessibility is an issue of sight impairment, but there are actually five categories of disability for people using the internet: hearing, sight, cognitive, neurological, and physical. Each type presents unique challenges to web access.

Today, accessibility is no longer a 'nice-to-have' website element but is more of a necessity. Most countries have enforced laws for web and digital accessibility. To ensure that your site is accessible to everyone, you should include accessibility into your web governance plan. As a starting point, refer to an accessibility standard based on your audience demographics and local accessibility laws to see what your site needs to do to be more inclusive. The

current global standard for accessibility is the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines that was developed by the W3C. It is good practice to develop some organizational guidelines on web accessibility based on the WCAG and work towards implementing them.

Quality Assurance

On the web, as in life, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Simply put, in today's world, an organization's online presence is synonymous with its identity. When visitors arrive on a website with many small issues or basic problems, their trust in that organization is automatically diminished. Having consistent quality assurance processes will ensure that your content remains error-free and meets your website standards. Some quality assurance issues you should be looking out for include:

Broken links
A broken link or a dead link is a link on a website that no longer works due to either a change in the link's URL, the destination page of the link being removed or no longer existing, the users are blocked by a firewall that prevents access to the destination page, or the page has restricted access.

Broken images

Broken images are images that fail to load for a number of reasons, such as the image having an image location that is incorrect or out of date.

Misspellings

Misspellings happen to the best of us, but having a site with too many undetected typos can tarnish your brand image as it makes you seem sloppy and less trustworthy.

Readability

Readability is an important aspect of user experience. It is the ability for users to read and comprehend your text easily. Readability can be measured using tests and scoring like the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Test, the Gunning Fog Index, and more.

The fact is that while these sorts of errors may seem minor, they can have a major impact on a website's user experience and overall reputation.

SEO

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is one of the most fundamental elements of a well-performing website. Few organizations have unlimited marketing budgets to ensure their website always ranks at the top of search results. However, careful and thorough SEO can noticeably boost rankings in organic search without the need for increased marketing spend. If neglected, SEO errors can not only negatively impact your search ranking, but also harm user experience, causing visitors to click away sooner than they would have otherwise.

Some examples of SEO checks you should incorporate into your web governance policies and processes include, but are not limited to, the following issues:

Missing alt text

Alt texts are important elements in terms of web accessibility, but these image descriptions provide more context to search engines too, which helps the image to be indexed properly.

Missing meta descriptions

Meta descriptions are short descriptions of the page's content that is previewed in the search results. Tailoring your meta descriptions to be engaging can have a strong influence on the page's click-through rate. This, in turn, can have a positive impact on the page's ranking. If a page lacks a meta description, search engines will just pull a snippet of text from the main body of the page instead which may not be as descriptive or relevant to searchers.

H1 tag issues

The H1 tag is the headline on your page. Some common issues with H1 tags include missing H1 tags, having multiple H1 tags, and having identical H1 and title tags.

Duplicate content

Having duplicate content on your website doesn't necessarily mean that you'll be slapped with a Google penalty. However, duplicate content can affect your search ranking as these identical pages can cannibalize each other for the same position on search engines, which runs the risk of Google favoring one page over another.

100%

COMPLETE!

Content Strategy

In order to produce high quality results consistently, web teams need guidance and rules under which to operate. As an excellent example of web governance in action, having a content strategy in place outlines who your authors and editors are, the different roles they hold in creating content for the website, the type of content that should be produced, the policies that guide the production of content, and the process of publishing content onto the site.

A good way to start to apply governance to a content plan is to audit the existing content on your site. From this audit, you can see what content your site needs and develop a plan for updating, removing, and creating content. You should also create clear content policies to guide the day-to-day actions of your digital team. Having consistent content policies such as brand, style, data, and topic guidelines in place is an effective way to optimize your online presence. These policies outline how content should be created for your website. Content policies will also ensure that you adhere to any industry or government laws governing your websites. This can be particularly important in some industries, such as governmental agencies, financial organizations, and public sector bodies. For example, state and federal government agencies must comply with specific style guides and must make their content accessible to audiences of all abilities.

Another important aspect of a content strategy is to develop an editorial calendar to create an overview of future content. There should also be a clear process in place that describes the review, approval, and publishing to ensure that the content adheres to the policies, guidelines, and standards set for it.

Performance

One aspect of web governance that is often overlooked is the performance and speed of your website. Does the website load quickly? Is it able to meet the demands of users? Sites can crash suddenly and unless tools are in place to notify the appropriate parties, potential visitors are lost and the organization's reputation is tarnished. Your website will need to have performance guidelines to define expectations and standards for page speed and response times.

Without question, today's internet users have a need for speed. A few years ago, visitors were willing to wait around four seconds for a site to load. Now, that's been cut in half to less than two seconds. According to Google, if a page load time increases from 1 second to 3 seconds, the bounce rate of the site increases by 32%. Furthermore, if a page takes over 6 seconds to load, the bounce rate increases by 106%! In today's digital world, the users' attention is the prize, and your website will have to work to improve response times to remain competitive in the battle for that precious attention.

In May 2020, Google introduced a new set of best practices that takes into account user experience (UX) as a search ranking factor. Search optimization will no longer be solely for keywords, but also for a smoother and more delightful web experience. These UX best practices include

performance metrics like loading experience, interactivity, and visual stability of page content. Thus, performance and speed will be extremely vital to the success of your website.

As important as fast response time is, it's also essential for websites to monitor and control their uptime and downtime to avoid frustrating potential users or damaging the organization's reputation for reliability. While errors and issues cannot always be avoided, it is possible to minimize the damage to your organization's reputation with web standards and procedures in place that can respond quickly to problems and issues.

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[4]Core Web Vitals report. https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9205520?hl=en

Why Do So Many Websites Lack Good Web Governance?

Lack of Knowledge

If good web governance is so important, why then do so many websites fall short of it? While each business or organization is different, it is often the case that a lack of web governance is caused by a lack of understanding of the need of best practices to provide structure to the process of a website's creation and maintenance. Most web teams adopt a reactive approach to web governance, only placing focus on it when there are major issues to be tackled, or if there are project-based tasks, like redesigns, to be implemented.

Lack of Resources

At the same time, web governance failure is often caused by an organization having too much to do and not having enough resources to do it. It's increasingly common for web teams to receive more demands than their current resources allow them to deliver.

Lack of Management and Set Systems

In other instances, web governance failure may result from what can be thought of as a history of inattention. In countless organizations, web teams have been left to their own devices for years. The result is a tension within the organization over the division of digital labor as no one is sure exactly who does what. Does a content manager or a digital specialist manage the CMS? Does a developer contribute to the design? While the necessary tasks are being completed, there are few rules or regulations concerning the ways those tasks should be done and by whom. Systems that began informally and functioned well enough to get the job done at one time can become stuck in rigid systems unsuited to the organization's needs today.

Resources are Not Scalable

Other organizations may have the issue of governance not keeping up with growth. At one time, the organization may have had only one website to manage, but some sites now have multiple branded domains due to a larger organization, localization of sites, etc. It is also necessary to oversee other

branded digital presences like apps, YouTube videos, and social media, in addition to the wide variety of devices used to access those channels.

Unfortunately, for many organizations, the growth in volume and complexity has not been balanced by a corresponding growth in resources and the leadership needed to manage a complex and vast digital presence. Even though web teams are often quite adept at managing the day to day aspects of their organization's digital presence, that cannot compensate for a lack of true governance.

Lack of Coordination Amongst Teams

Another issue lies in the fact that more and more digital roles are added to the organization as it grows. Roles are spread throughout the organization, so without a system of governance it can be difficult for them to coordinate as they should. Even when teams are more centralized there is still a need for an overarching strategy to follow in order to be effective. Finally, when teams are consumed with looking down at the day-to-day operations without governance, no one is left to look to the future in anticipation of new trends and developments.

Conclusion

We hope you've learned a little about web governance and its importance, along with how good web governance is achieved through effective web management. Without a doubt, web governance secures order and control on essential activities and digital properties on your website. Furthermore, when done well, it can catalyze business growth. A lack of proper web governance in turn, results in diminished credibility, which ultimately can lead to a loss in revenue or a damaged reputation.

While smaller businesses and organizations may be able to formulate and execute a good web governance structure on their own, larger institutions may have difficulty reigning in the chaos of their digital footprint. An investment in proper web governance allows them to reimpose order on online operations that may have gotten out of control or been allowed to expand without direction.

With a proper system of web governance in place, various teams are free to work on their respective areas without fear of overlap or redundancies. As online roles within organizations continue to specialize, the need for web governance grows even more imperative, as it actually determines 'who does what.'

If you were in construction, you wouldn't continue to add rooms and floors to a building without ensuring it had a proper foundation to support the structure. While organizations may manage to get by in the beginning, gaining and keeping control over the digital chaos and content clutter becomes more imperative as the organization grows. Fortunately, new tools have emerged to better organize and support digital operations. Without a doubt, the development and implementation of a web governance framework allows organizations to finally manage the chaos of their digital presence and bring it back under control.

Implementing a system of web governance will improve your organization's efficiency and productivity, as well as enhancing the overall user experience for your visitors. The earlier an organization commits to web governance, the more successful it will ultimately be - in part because proper web governance enables you to get the management of your digital presence right the first time, thereby saving time and resources by avoiding redundancies and endless revisions. Careful planning can result in a web governance model that grows and expands as the organization grows. Ideally, you want your web governance strategy to serve as a roadmap to success for your organization. As the digital landscape continues to change, web governance is constantly evolving to meet new challenges as they arise.