

REVAMPING AN ASSOCIATION'S WEBSITE: A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR REDESIGN

Presented by Michael Jawer
Revisoning Strategies

[Association's] website presents a considerable amount of useful information for first-time visitors – and assuredly for members. However, the content needs to be reorganized, and the look and feel refreshed, based on the answers to five fundamental questions:

- 1) What is the main audience that [organization] wishes to reach?
- 2) What is the major 'takeaway' for that constituency?
- 3) What are secondary audiences and purposes for the website?
- 4) What are the secondary 'takeaways' for these expected audiences?
- 5) How will the website conform with [group's] other public affairs materials and presentations (or vice versa)?

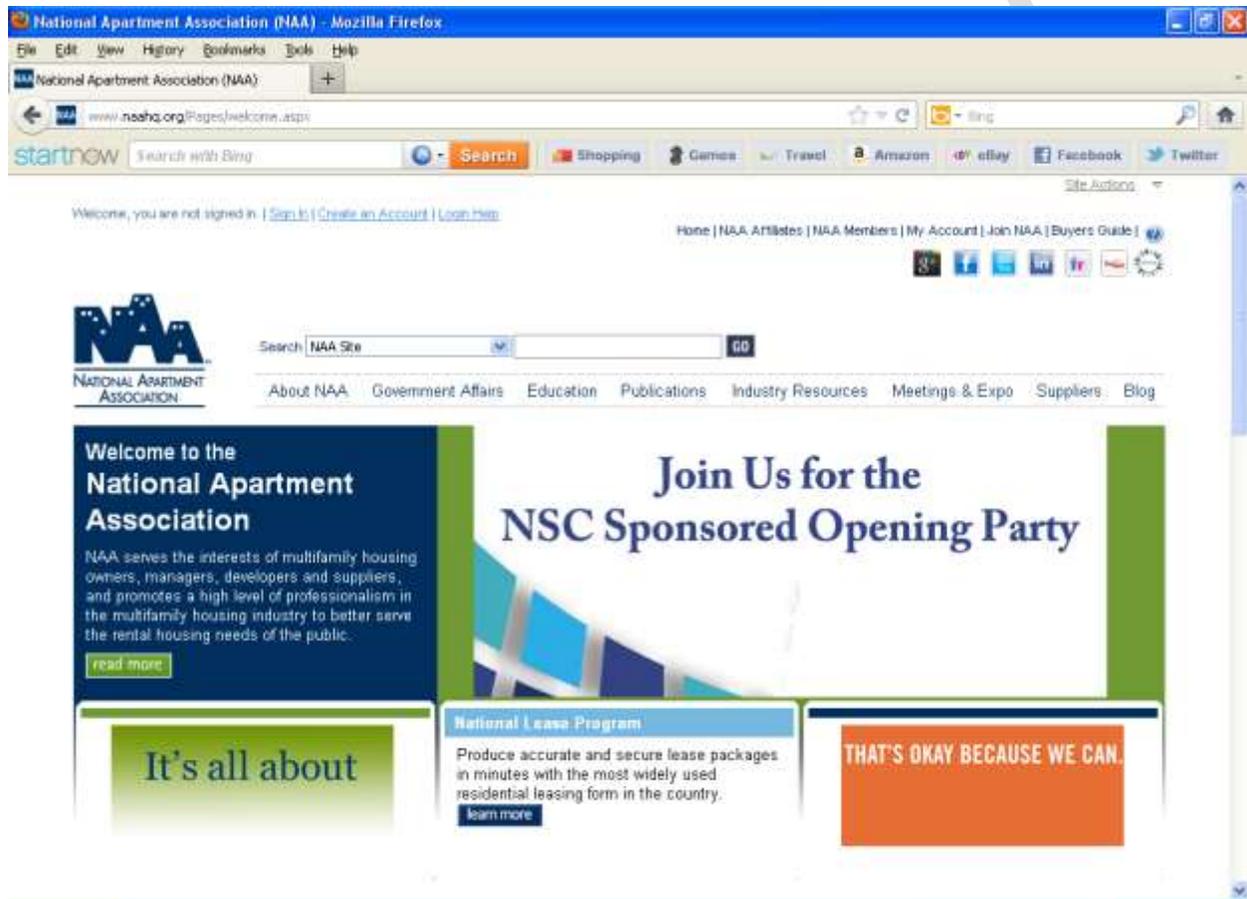
It may be helpful to scan a selection of association websites to compare and contrast how they answer these questions. These are quite a bit different in organization, look and feel but all are decisive in answering the above questions. We will consider four main approaches:

- Sites oriented toward member interests and needs
- Sites oriented toward association products
- Sites oriented toward public causes
- Sites oriented toward government advocacy
- Sites that represent a membership/advocacy 'hybrid'
- Sites that represent a membership/product 'hybrid'

Selected Association Websites

“Members first” website # 1

National Apartment Association



Highlights:

- Three-column layout with member-focused banner dominating top of page
- “What’s New” and apartment industry news tailored to immediate needs
- Government affairs issues and key products/resources featured toward bottom
- Member log-in prominent

“Members first” website # 2

American Association of School Administrators

The screenshot shows the AASA website homepage. At the top, there are advertisements for 'AdvancED International Summit 2012' and 'Expect More from Healthcare'. The main navigation bar includes links for Home, About, Shop, Your Career, AASA Partners, Advertisers, Newsroom, and School Solutions. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with tabs for Policy & Advocacy, Resources, Leadership Development, Events, Membership, and Children's Programs. The central content area features a large graphic with the text 'Connecting Education, Leadership and Community' and a 3D cube graphic. To the right is a 'Log In' section with fields for User Name and Password, and links for registration and password recovery. At the bottom, there are links for 'Management After a' and various news and resource categories.

Highlights:

- Full of “news you can use” for members
- Rotating header is always focused on “why do we bring benefit”
- Very much focused on current events and members in the news
- Feature: executive director blog/radio/video/twitter feeds

“Product” focused website

National Fire Protection Association

The screenshot shows the NFPA website interface. At the top, the browser title is "NFPA - Mozilla Firefox" and the address bar shows "www.nfpa.org/index.asp?cookie_test=1". The website header includes the NFPA logo and the tagline "The authority on fire, electrical, and building safety". A search bar is located in the top right. The main navigation menu consists of several tabs: "Sign-in", "Join / Renew", "My Profile", "Catalog", "News & Publications", "About NFPA", and "Press Room". Below this, a secondary menu highlights "CODES & STANDARDS", "SAFETY INFORMATION", "TRAINING", "RESEARCH", and "MEMBERSHIP". A large promotional banner for the "NFPA CONFERENCE & EXPO" is featured, with the text "Register by April 27 and SAVE" and "THE PREMIER EVENT IN FIRE & LIFE SAFETY". The main content area is divided into three sections: "NFPA CATALOG TOP SELLERS" with links to various handbooks and codes; "NFPA JOURNAL" with a link to the current issue; and "PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES" with a link to learn more about safety campaigns. At the bottom, a "HIGHLIGHTS" section contains links to a newsletter and conference registration, while a "QUICK LINKS" section provides direct access to "Code professionals" and "Fire service".

Highlights:

- Journal, newsletter, handbooks, safety standards prominent above all else
- Assumption is that you know about NFPA before coming to the site
- Among the rotating features are two appealing to kids and families: partnership with LEGOLAND in Florida and “Sparky’s Fire Truck Page” (suggests a marketing opportunity for [association])

“Cause oriented” website #1

National Conference on Citizenship



Highlights:

- Conveys one leading “action” message and one resource (in this case, report linking civic engagement and employment)
- Everything on the website – information, resources, links, and dialogue – buttresses the cause this group exists to further.

“Cause oriented” website #2

Green Schools Alliance

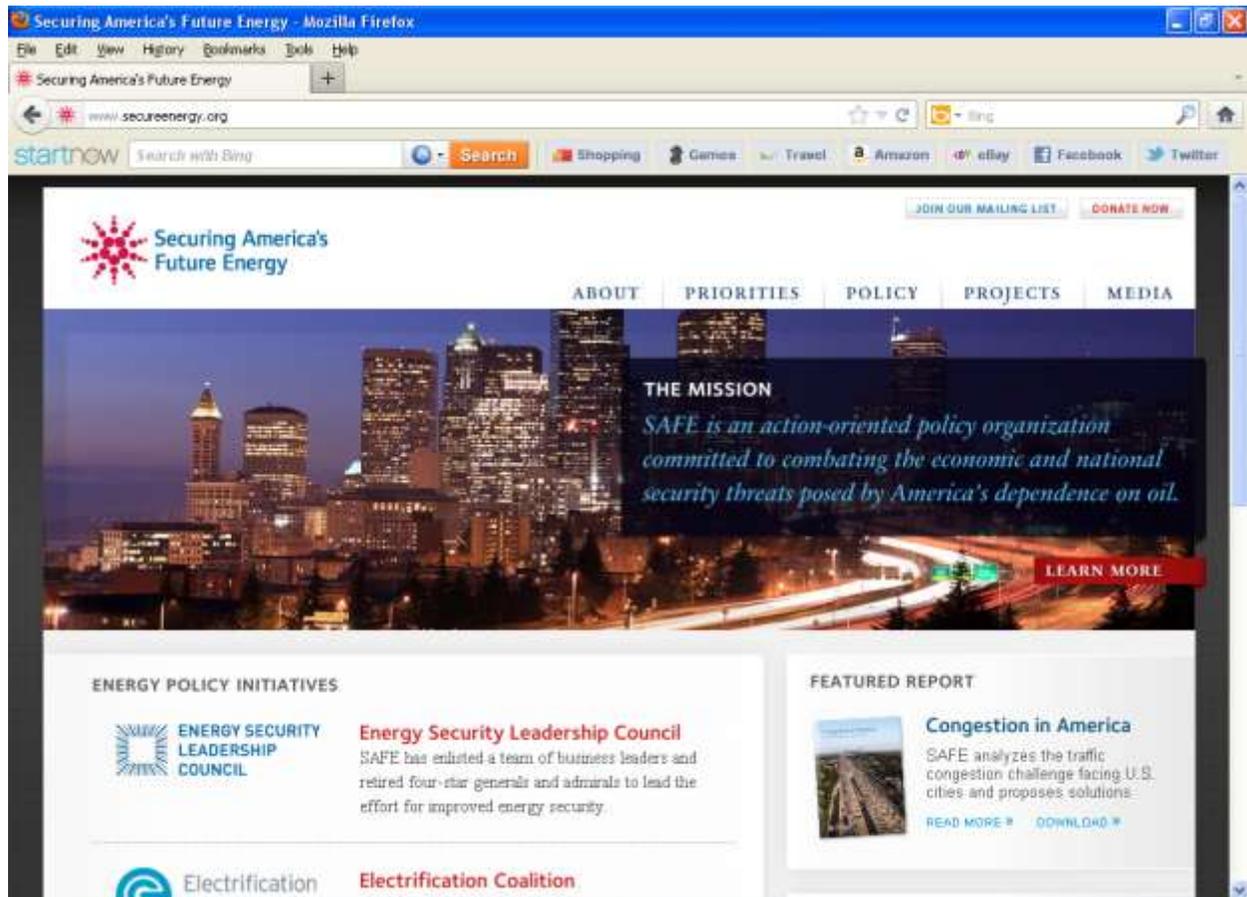


Highlights:

- Focus on movement toward greener schools and progress toward Coalition goals
- Green, blue and yellow convey brightness of purpose
- Main message is “get in on the action”

Straightforward advocacy site

Securing America's Energy Future



Highlights:

- Red, white, dark blue and black convey seriousness and 'patriotism' of policy aims
- News items, policy center (blog) and featured report all focus on the particular mission

Membership/advocacy hybrid

National Association of Industrial & Office Properties



Highlights:

- Focus on professionalism (member forums, online courses)
- But presentation conveys advocacy involvement and seriousness of public affairs commitment (colors and layout a bit more restrained)
- Intended for public policymakers to consult as much as members

Membership/product hybrid

American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air Conditioning Contractors

The screenshot shows the ASHRAE website homepage. The browser window title is "Home | ashrae.org - Mozilla Firefox". The address bar shows "www.ashrae.org". The page features a blue header with navigation links: "Resources & Publications", "Standards, Research & Technology", "Education & Certification", "Government Affairs", "Society Groups", and "Membership & Conferences". The main content area includes a large image of a modern building interior with the headline "Resourceful by Nature" and a sub-headline "bEQ Program". Below this are several promotional banners: "REGISTER FOR SAN ANTONIO", "CALL FOR COMMENTS", "ASHRAE co-sponsors AHR EXPO", and "ASHRAE Online Store".

Highlights:

- Sky blue dominates, suggesting tranquility and sustainability
- Tagline bolsters message (“Shaping Tomorrow’s Built Environment Today”)
- Three-column layout highlights guidance and standards but also features journal, case study, and annual conference

Combination

[Revisioning Strategies page substituted here for association's page]



Highlights [pertaining to association's site]:

- Sea blue/green and rotating photos convey 'water' related nature of industry
- Box at top left offers quick overview of site resources
- Boxes underneath are a hodge-podge, relating to members but also media and policymakers.
- Logo may call for redesign
- Text box below rotating photos is crowded and first three links are unexplained

- In all, the site requires greater focus (who is the chief intended audience?) and sharper delineation of offered information/resources.

Going Forward

The website snapshots presented above are intended to assist [organization] in:

- a) thinking through the major questions presented at the outset; and
- b) developing answers that are clearly translated into redevelopment decisions for the site.

Having worked with several associations (and Federal agencies) to redesign their sites – as well as having created my own websites in service to my books and business – I am experienced in conducting the process with members and staff decision makers.

The aim in every case is to develop a site that:

- speaks clearly to the major intended audience
- makes sure the desired information is easily found
- has an organizational scheme consistent with the needs of priority users
- has a “look and feel” that reinforces the association’s online aims
- is consistent with [group’s] other public information and presentations

I look forward to working with [association] to optimally tell the industry’s story and advance its members’ interests via its website and all other marketing communications avenues.