

5 Ways to Modernize Your Campus Website Now

Stand Out from the Competition with a Website that Wows



Freshmen [enrollment has dropped 16%](#) at U.S. colleges, according to the New York Times. In this transformational moment in higher education, the critical importance your website plays in recruiting prospective students cannot be downplayed.

A modern campus website is more than sharing student stories and beauty shots of your school—it's a reflection of your school's brand. A website that is clean, easy to navigate, and well-organized suggests that your institution is managed efficiently. Easy-to-find information illustrates an administration's eagerness to help students along in their academic journey. It also needs to show prospective students the value they'll get by enrolling at your institution.

So how does your website stack up?

This guide highlights 5 ways to modernize your campus website so that it stands out from the competition. Among the tips:

1. Learn the basics of good design
2. Craft content that speaks to the intended audience
3. Be inclusive
4. Use data to inform content choices
5. Strengthen your site with a powerful CMS

Your campus website is not only a tool—it's the virtual front door to your institution. And while prospective students won't make a final decision on where to attend college based on your website, you don't want a disconnect between your website and what your campus actually offers.

1

Learn the basics of good design

A survey taken in the early days of the web found that design quality is one of four key ways that a website communicates trustworthiness and an implied promise of good service. Twenty years later, design quality remains a stable factor in determining trustworthiness of a site, even as design trends have changed.

Good website design has several important components, all of which are outlined by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). However, let's focus on three: strong visual design, understandable architecture, and accuracy.

According to one study, people form an opinion about a web page's visual appeal in 50 milliseconds. That's right—milliseconds. Needless to say, looks matter when it comes to website design. Layout, hamburger menus, color scheme, typography, videos, responsive images, and flat design are among the various elements of modern website design that work together to create a strong brand presence and digital experience.



Not a designer?

Download [College and University Website Redesign: The Ultimate Guide](#) for a comprehensive look at everything you need to know about initiating and executing a website redesign project in higher ed.

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Another aspect is understandable architecture, or site organization. Your users have short attention spans, so you must anticipate the information they want and make it easy to find on your site. Simple navigation with place markers such as headings and subtopics help your audience move easily through content. A [well-organized website](#) is also easier for search engines to index, which can affect your site's SEO.

The third component, accuracy, seems obvious, but many websites are littered with misspelled words, broken links, and outdated information. A modern site requires constant maintenance to stay fresh and up to date.

Overall, the point of good design is to provide your audience with a pleasant user experience so they'll spend more time exploring your website and the benefits of your college or university.

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A website is never truly finished. Things like surveying students, looking at marketing trends, enrollment trends, refining the value proposition, rotating content messaging and events leading to institutional distinction are just a few things that can continue to force the evolution of your site. The question is, can you keep up?

– [Joseph Sallustio](#) | CEO, [Claremont Lincoln University](#)
[Jay Casper](#) | President, [Data Driven Marketing](#)
[Clarence Bowman](#) | President, [Bowman Design Works](#)

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2

Craft content that speaks to the intended audience

Both high school and transfer students consider a college's website to be the most influential source of information in a college search. That's why website content is so crucial to your marketing efforts.

The modern campus website features well-written content with a consistent voice that builds and [reinforces brand awareness](#). Even better is when that same content is tailored to address the concerns of specific audiences.

Prospective students enrolling straight from high school appreciate admissions information presented in an authoritative but friendly voice.



Transfer students, already enrolled at a higher education institution and more pragmatic in their college decision, prefer information focused on outcomes.

Parents have different concerns and like content that gets to the point, whether it's about financial aid and tuition or safety on campus.

Above all, think of your content as the answer to someone's question. Your website should be a go-to source to help various audiences solve their problems as fast as possible.

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If you keep your eye on creating a human-centered design, it will help you have great content. Once you have great content, you're going to gain more users over time. The more users you have, then of course the higher your page ranks.

— Eric Turner, Assistant Director of Web and Portal Services, Mt. San Antonio College

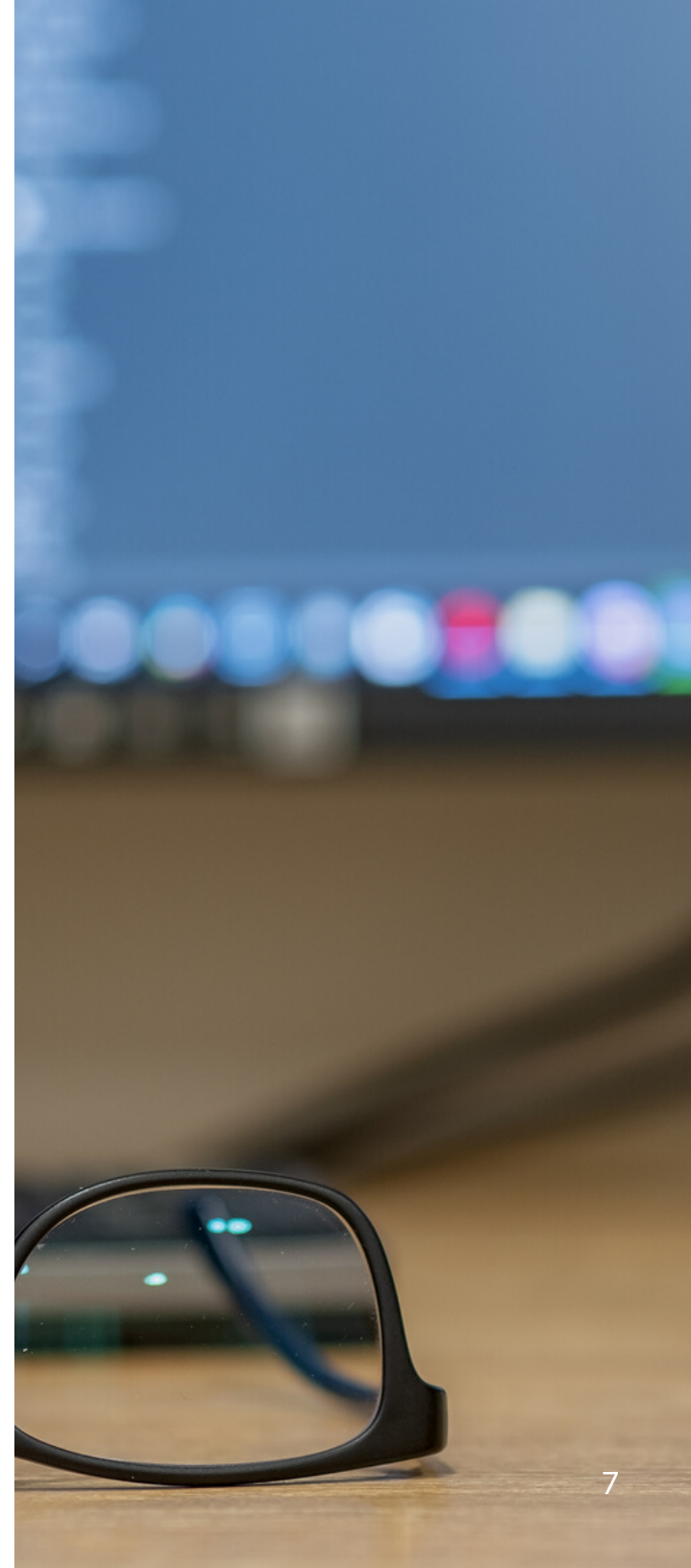
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3

Be inclusive

More than any other design element, inclusivity is a hallmark of modern web design. Inclusivity encompasses accessibility, usability, and inclusiveness—in other words, it must work for everyone.

Historically, accessibility has focused on people with disabilities. In fact, 11 percent of university and college students have a disability—that's 11 percent of your site's total potential traffic. In reality, everyone has different abilities. Students with visual impairment struggle to read text against a low contrast background. Those with ADD can be distracted by certain types of music in website videos. A modern website reflects accessibility considerations from these different perspectives. And as accessibility standards evolve, progressive schools will continue to prioritize accessibility.





Don't leave your website's accessibility to chance.

See how it stacks up with WCAG 2.1 guidelines by requesting a [free web accessibility scan](#) today.

REQUEST NOW



A usable website is user-centered, meaning that every decision in design, development, and content is focused on the user. This includes common features such as easy navigation, responsiveness, consistency, and intuitive design. But it also delves into content, which should be informative, clear, understandable, and free of academic jargon. Likewise, the purpose and mission of your institution should be clearly stated.

Finally, the current undergraduate college student population is 52.9% white, 20.9% Hispanic, 15.2% Black, and 7.6% Asian. Why would prospective students want to attend your college or university if they don't see themselves reflected in the images and content on your website? Review your website with an eye on exclusion—who is not represented—and then work to remedy those oversights. True inclusiveness is not an afterthought. It begins at ideation.

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In order for real improvements to be made, everyone (adjuncts, faculty, staff, and students) needs to continue asking the bigger questions: Who are the users in higher education? What are their needs and motivations? Which services do they utilize at the institution? What services do they need that aren't currently available? Keeping in mind larger goals as professionals can help to improve usability and awareness in higher education.

— Rachael Renk | UX Research and Design Writer

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4

Use data to inform content choices

Data from email campaigns, social platforms, and your website provides insight into patterns and trends that can be used to write targeted content. For example, comparing demographic data of prospective students to actual student enrollment identifies a subset of students more likely to submit applications and enroll in your school. If results uncover a growing population of enrolled first-generation students, you'll want to increase content on your website that answers questions this particular group may have.

There are several other ways to make content choices based on data:

- Improve existing content: Website pages with high traffic, conversions, and organic search reports should be first on your list for improvements and continual monitoring.



Content drives online marketing.

Learn how to maximize the potential of your college website with our guide [Manage Website Content Like a Pro: 8 Steps to Success.](#)

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- Research competitors to keep content relevant: Students visit other schools' websites, too. See what they're reading there, determine what competitor keywords and pages perform best, and then fine-tune your content accordingly.
- [Analyze the big picture:](#) Tracking activity across departments can reveal big picture behavior of your website audience. This is especially helpful when writing content such as admissions pages that have a broader, more generalized reach.

Using data to inform content choices is a long-term investment. What's trending today will be replaced by a different topic tomorrow. To modernize your campus website, you'll need to stay current.

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In the past, universities collected data mainly to report for accreditation purposes and it was always retroactive or historical data that we were looking at. Now we're able to look at data to really do predictive analytics and target and personalize student and faculty experiences at the university. That shift from other industries is now moving into higher education.

— [Hadassah Yang](#), [Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Research and Planning](#), [Brandman University](#)

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Strengthen your site with a powerful CMS

The challenges of maintaining a modern website run much deeper than your actual public-facing website. In fact, the aforementioned features of a modern website all depend on the power and flexibility of a web content management system (CMS) to be successful.

If you're planning to implement a new CMS in the near future, begin with an accessibility assessment. A quality CMS makes it easy to incorporate usability features such as alt text tags, heading structures, and unique navigation links into your web page. Forms and other content should be accessible by using the keyboard. And for real ease of use, the CMS should include built-in accessibility checks.



A great CMS will also include great customer service, technical support, and training. You'll also want access to accessibility experts that you can call should problems arise. If you're unsure about this benefit, ask the CMS provider for current customer references.

Another consideration is whether the underlying code is overly complicated, making it difficult to make changes. And if developers do make changes, are there safeguards to ensure that your accessibility framework stays secure? Finally, is the CMS updated automatically? If not, you might be required to re-implement accessibility fixes with each manual update.

When it comes to supporting the features needed to modernize your website, all content management systems are not created equal.

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A quality CMS must be flexible and have the ability to scale for other things, interact with databases, or pull databases into your templates. The framework needs to be adaptable, simple, and user-friendly. And while a developer can work with any system, the majority of users have simple technological skill sets. They might not understand how a CMS works, but they need to drag-and-drop content and publish it.

– Mark Rimar | Director, Web Services, Saint Louis University

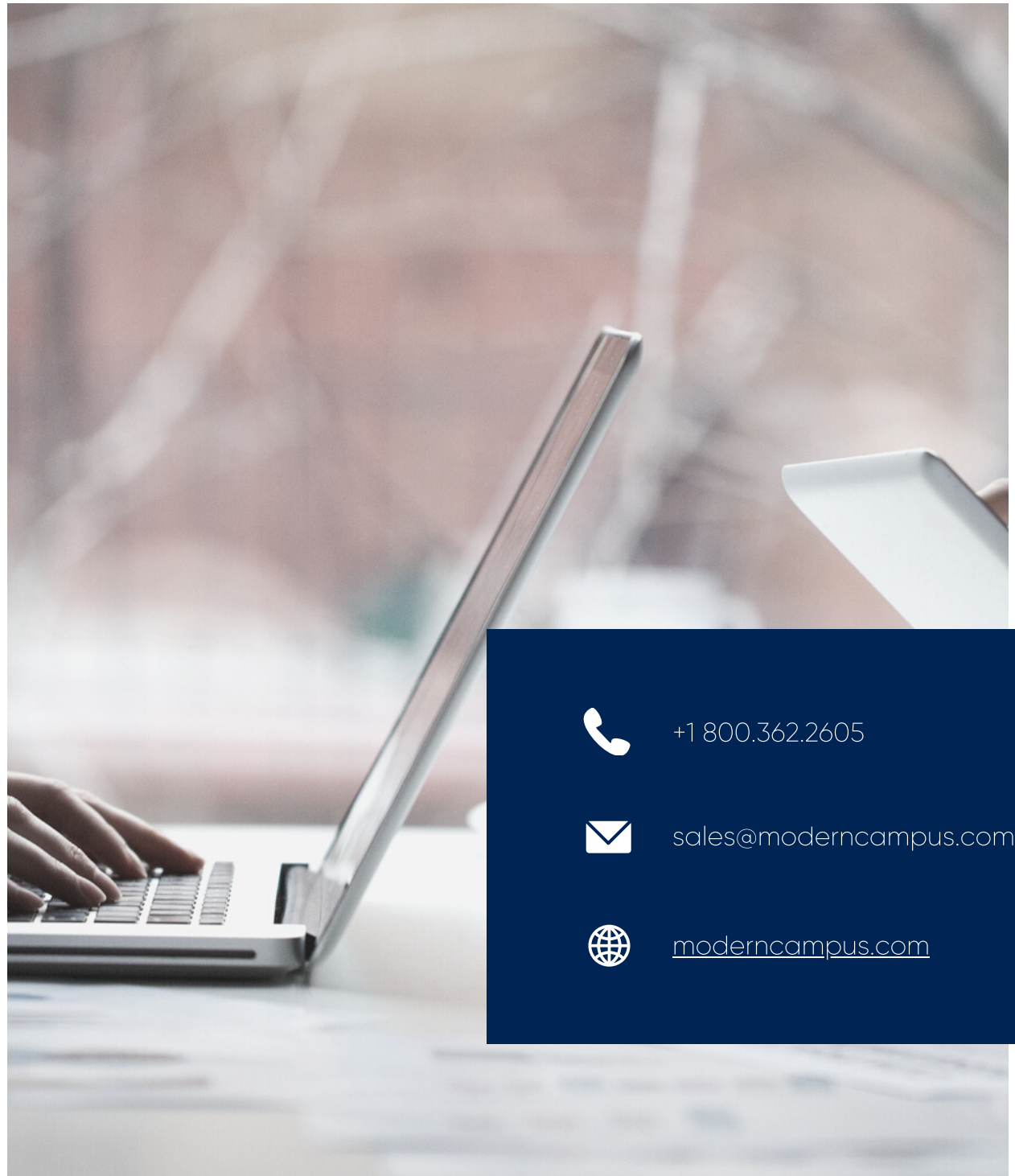
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About Modern Campus

Modern Campus, the innovator driving Omni CMS and Destiny One, empowers higher education institutions to thrive when radical change is required to successfully respond to lower student enrollments and revenue, rising costs, crushing student debt and even school closures.

Powered by the industry's leading "student first" modern learner engagement platform, presidents and provosts can create pathways for lifelong learning, while marketing and IT leaders can deliver Amazon-like personalization and instant fulfillment.

Award-winning products and average annual revenue growth of 19% for its 550+ higher education customers have earned Modern Campus a 98% retention rate and a reputation for customer obsession.



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