

GUIDE TO OPTIMISING YOUR WEBSITE



RAISE *digit@l*

by Jean O'Brien

*for O'Kennedy
Consulting*

Contents

Page

3

Strong calls to action

Page

8

Landing pages

Page

13

Ease of navigation

Page

16

Web-friendly content

Page

20

Measurement

Page

25

Security & compliance

Page

27

Search engines

Page

30

Checklist of actions

About the author



This handbook was written and designed by **Jean O'Brien**, for the RAISE Programme with [O'Kennedy Consulting](#).

I'm a digital consultant and designer who has spent 20 years working in digital, with 15 of those years in the non-profit sector. See more about my work at: jeanobrien.com.

I founded [Digital Charity Lab](#) in 2014: a social enterprise that builds digital skills in non-profits, causes, arts organisations and campaigns.

Strong calls to action

Call to action: a prompt on your website that encourages users to take a specific action, such as donating, signing up to email or buying a ticket

Strong calls to action on your site will help you to convert visitors into active supporters.

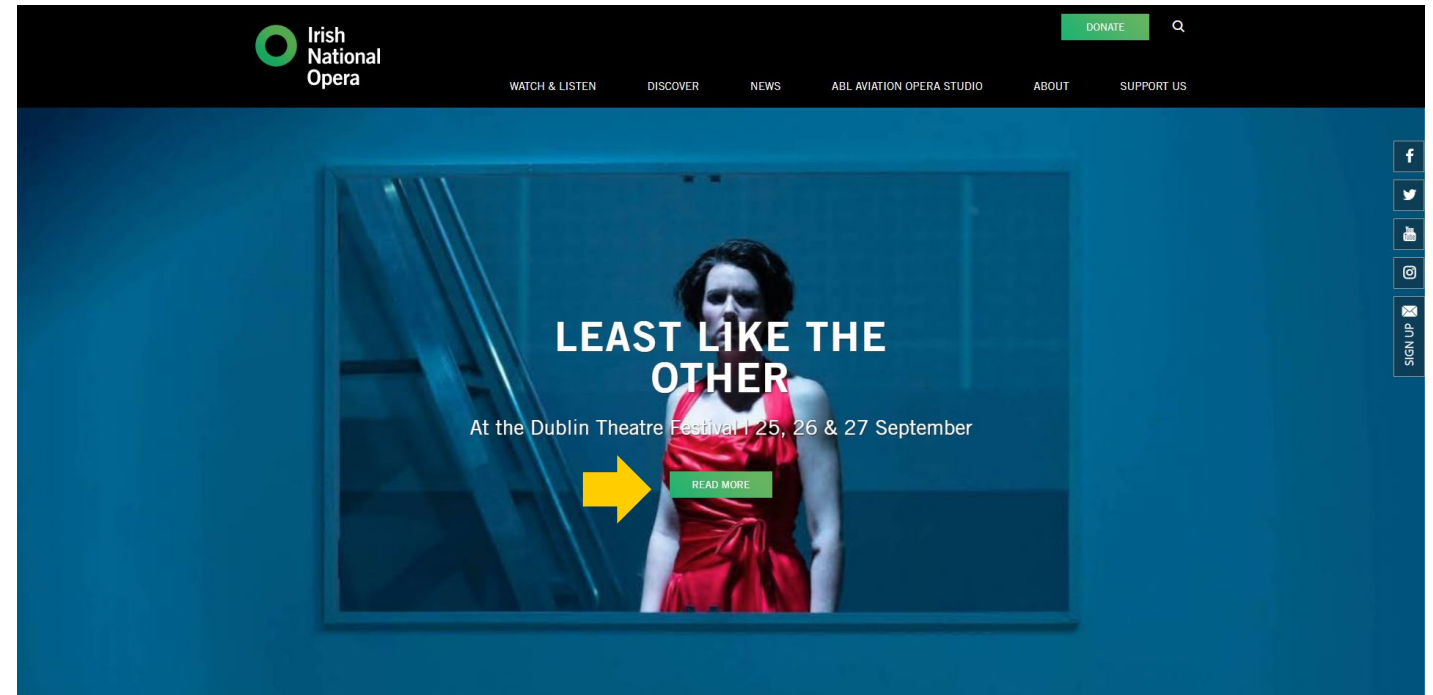
How to use calls to action on your website

Use call to action buttons on your website for your priority goals. They should be:

- clearly visible
- labelled with simple language - no jargon or internal terms
- used sparingly

Any more than about two main calls to action will confuse users. Too many choices suppress action: this is a known phenomenon in psychology, called the Paradox of Choice.

Attention spans are short, and expectations are that information should be easy to find.



Irish National Opera's website has two clear priority calls to action

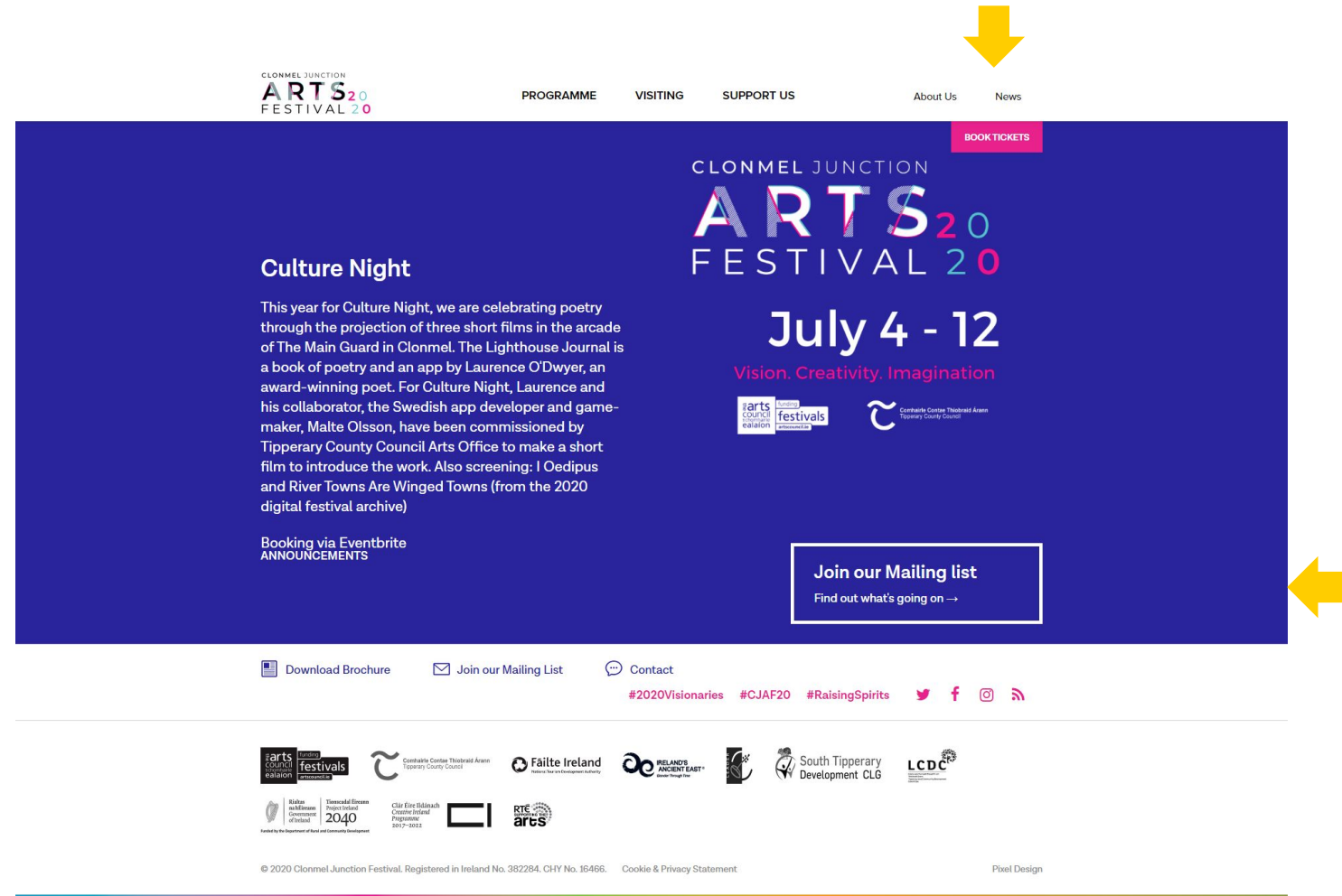
Use a visual hierarchy

Prioritise your most important calls to action with a visual hierarchy.

A brightly coloured, standalone button in the top right of each page is an effective way to promote your most important call to action.

A secondary call to action can appear on the page, and it's helpful if it's styled differently from the primary call to action - as in the 'join our mailing list' prompt in the example here.

Further links and prompts on the page can be styled as text links.



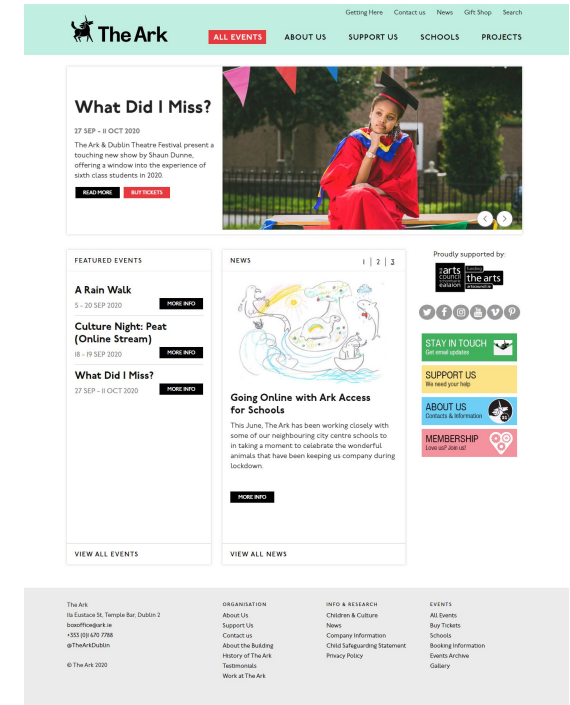
Clonmel Junction Arts Festival's site has a clear hierarchy on its homepage.

You don't have to put everything on your homepage

Many organisations feel that their homepage needs to show every single thing they do, and end up with a homepage that is long, cluttered and slow to load. Remember that most of your users won't be navigating through your site from the homepage: they will be sent straight to the specific page they need by Google.

Look at your Analytics and check how much traffic comes through your homepage: a common proportion is about 10%. If all your visitors are landing on your homepage, that would suggest that there's an issue with your search engine optimisation, and this should be looked into.

Your homepage doesn't have to include every single aspect of your work: instead think of it as an opportunity to funnel people to where you want them to go.



The Ark's homepage does a good job of highlighting multiple initiatives, without being cluttered or overwhelming.

A typical homepage with multiple features. Layouts like this can be slow to load, and create an extremely long page when viewed on mobile.

Don't use homepage sliders



Many organisations use homepage sliders to present multiple calls to action. However, they are not an effective solution: UX (user experience) research shows that most users only ever click on the first slide, and they cause accessibility issues for users with sight problems.

Because homepage sliders contain multiple large images, they can also slow down the loading time of your page.

Use a **single static image** with your **main priority call to action** instead.

Landing pages

'Landing page' has two meanings:

- 1. The first page a user lands on from Google or another source*
- 2. A standalone page with a single focus or goal*

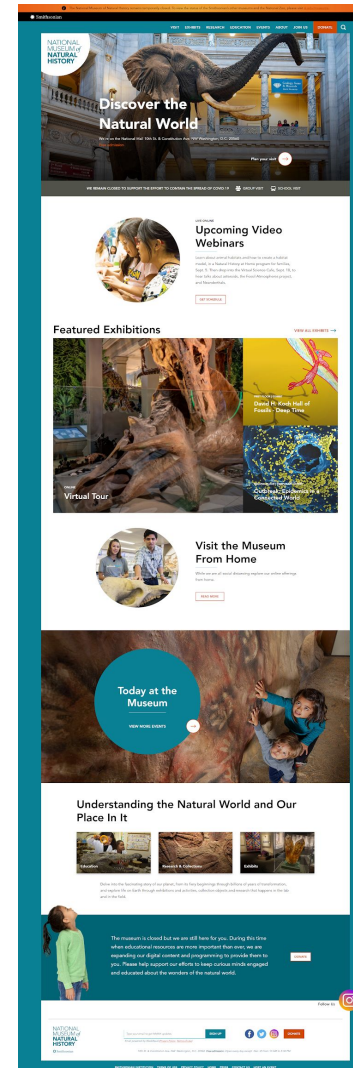
In this section, we're focusing on the second type: standalone pages that are promoting a single call to action.

Create landing pages for your most important actions

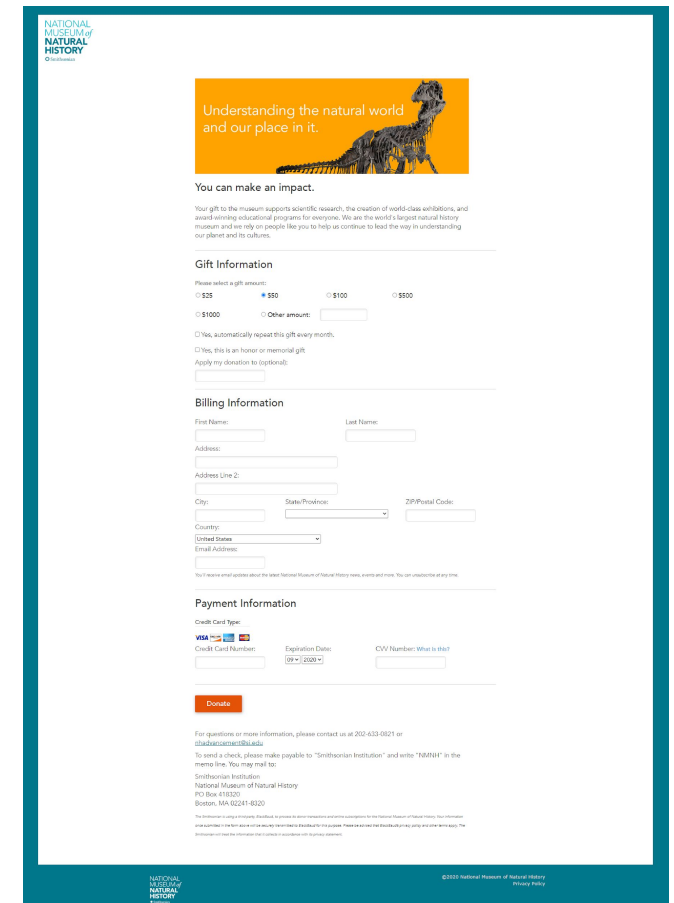
When a user lands on the homepage of the Smithsonian Natural History Museum website, they see a top navigation bar with links to different sections, and a number of colourful features that highlight different projects from the museum. This is a typical and effective approach for a website homepage: it's a kind of shop front for the organisation.

When the user clicks on the donate button, they are brought to a very different type of page. This page has no top navigation, just one single button that brings them back to the homepage. There are no links or features on this page: it is completely focused on getting the user to complete their donation.

This is an excellent example of a conversions-focused landing page.



The Smithsonian Natural History Museum homepage



The Smithsonian Natural History Museum donation page

Remove distractions from your donation page

This example shows some common pitfalls with conversion landing pages:

- Including further calls to action that are likely to distract the user. If someone was about to write you a cheque in person, you wouldn't interrupt and ask them to tell their friends first. Nor would you interrupt them and ask them to consider different ways to help. So don't do it online either!
- There's no imagery. A photograph would really help to make this page more interesting and also create an emotional connection to the beneficiaries of the donation.
- Top navigation visible on this page - this runs the risk of distracting the donor while they're completing the form

The screenshot shows the Alley Cat Allies donation page. At the top, the logo and navigation links (Get Help, Donate, Shop, My Profile, Search) are visible. A yellow arrow labeled 'distraction' points to the top navigation bar. Below the header, the main heading 'Make a Donation Today!' is followed by a paragraph about the organization's mission. Another yellow arrow labeled 'distraction' points to a link 'Learn more about other ways to give to and support Alley Cat Allies.' The form is divided into two main sections: 'Contact Information' and 'Select a Contribution Amount'. The 'Contact Information' section includes fields for Title, First name, Last name, Address 1, Address 2, City, State, Zip, Country, Phone Number, and Email Address. The 'Select a Contribution Amount' section includes radio buttons for \$15.00, \$50.00, \$100.00, \$500.00, and \$1000.00, and a checkbox for 'Yes, I would like to make this a monthly gift'. Below these is the 'Payment Information' section, which includes a dropdown for Payment Type (set to Credit Card), a Credit Card Number field, a Card Type dropdown, a CVV Number field, and an Expiration Date field. A yellow arrow labeled 'distraction' points to the 'Learn more about other ways to give to and support Alley Cat Allies.' link. At the bottom of the form is a large orange 'DONATE' button. Below the button is a Norton Secured logo and a footer with contact information.

Alley Cat Allies
25 Years of Advocacy

Get Help | Donate | Shop | My Profile | Search

Make a Donation Today!

With your generous support, we can continue to act on behalf of cats. Your donation will be used to protect and improve the lives of cats by educating caregivers, advocates, and cat lovers across the nation and advocating for policies in the best interests of cats.

Please allow a few moments for your donation to process. Thank you.

[Learn more about other ways to give to and support Alley Cat Allies.](#)

Contact Information

Title:

First name:

Last name:

Address 1:

Address 2:

City:

State:

Zip:

Country:

Phone Number:

Email Address:

Select a Contribution Amount

☒ \$15.00 ☐ \$50.00 ☐ \$100.00 ☐ \$500.00 ☐ \$1000.00

☐ Other

☐ Yes, I would like to make this a monthly gift

Payment Information

Payment Type:

Credit Card Number:

Card Type:

CVV Number:

Expiration Date: /

* Asterisk indicates a required field

Norton SECURED
powered by Symantec
ABOUT SSL CERTIFICATES

Questions? Call 1-866-309-6207 or email donate@alleycat.org

How to start using landing pages

Ask your web agency to create a new, stripped-back template for landing pages on your website.

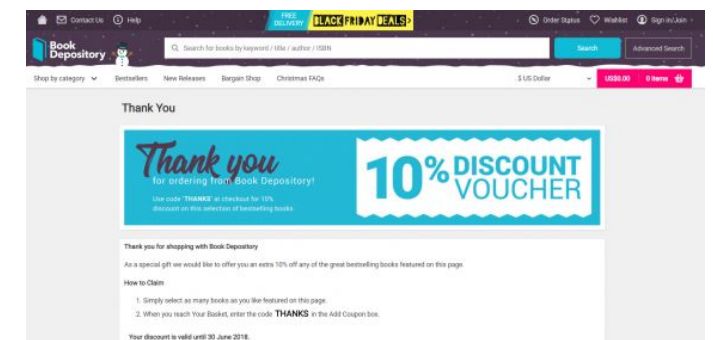
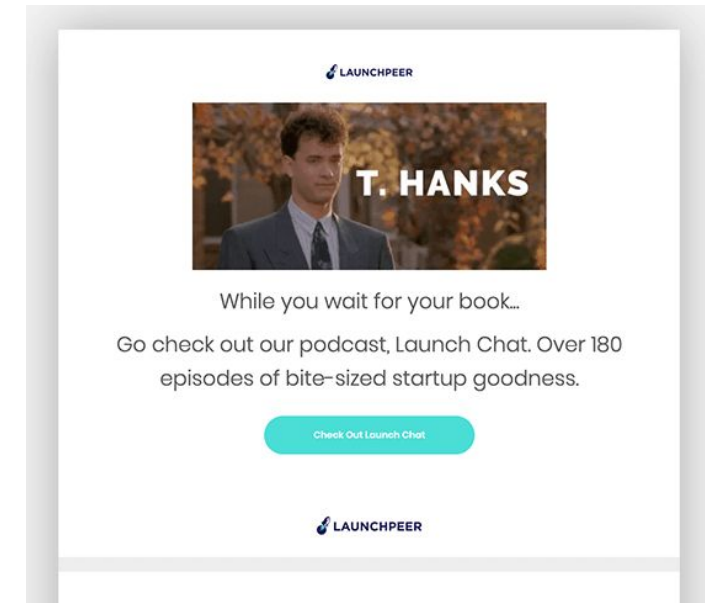
Alternatively, you can use a third party landing page service:

- [Unbounce](#) is a popular paid service, which allows you to create and split test landing pages. It provides detailed data on the performance of pages.
- [Mailchimp](#) offer free landing pages, and they will integrate with your mailing list if you use Mailchimp for emails.

Set up a landing page for each priority action (donate, become a member, register interest in corporate sponsorship) and for each campaign.

Make use of the confirmation page after your landing page: people are highly engaged at this point, it's a great time to ask them to do something else. You can add secondary asks or offers to confirmation and thank you pages.

Make the thank you pages attractive and engaging.



Create a standalone landing page for your email signup

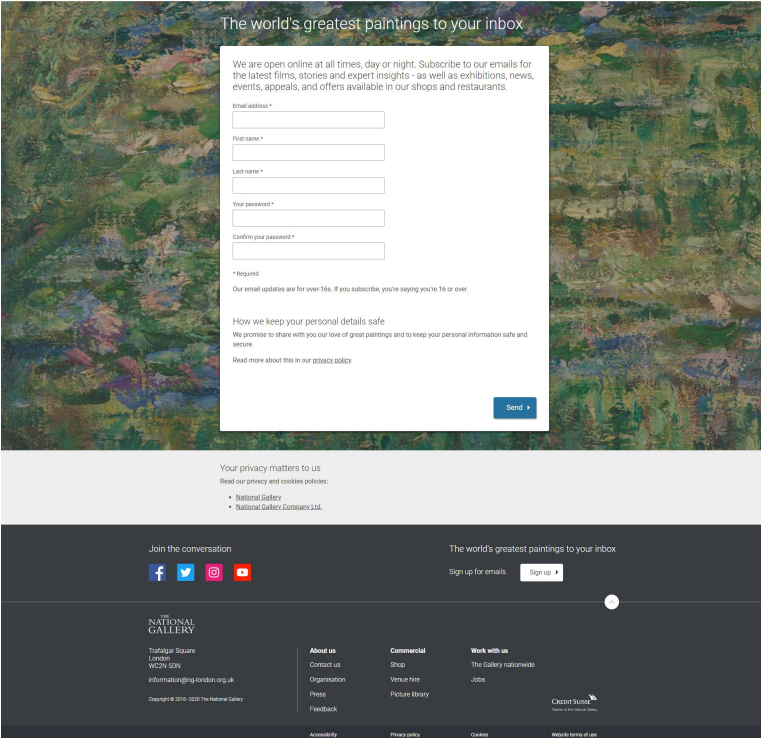
Email is a very valuable channel and acquiring email subscribers should be one of the priority goals for your website.

Many websites have the email signup in the footer of each page; but these can be hard to find for a new user. The same applies to pop-up forms.

By creating a standalone email signup page, you can send users directly to your email form from a number of channels: Google Ads, social media, email signatures.

A standalone page on your website is more measurable than using the hosted signup form with Mailchimp or other email services.

Ask your web agency to set up an email signup page, with an embedded form.



The world's greatest paintings to your inbox

We are open online at all times, day or night. Subscribe to our emails for the latest films, stories and expert insights - as well as exhibitions, news, events, appeals, and offers available in our shops and restaurants.

Email address *

First name *

Last name *

Your password *

Confirm your password *

* Required

Our email updates are for over-16s. If you subscribe, you're saying you're 16 or over.

How we keep your personal details safe

We promise to share with you our love of great paintings and to keep your personal information safe and secure.

Read more about this in our [privacy policy](#)

[Send](#)

Your privacy matters to us

Read our [privacy](#) and [cookies policies](#)

- National Gallery
- National Gallery Company Ltd.

Join the conversation

[f](#) [t](#) [i](#) [v](#)

The world's greatest paintings to your inbox

Sign up for emails [Sign up](#)

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Trafalgar Square
London
WC2N 5DN
[Information@nationalgallery.org.uk](#)

Copyright © 2015-2020 The National Gallery

About us

- Contact us
- Organisation
- Press
- Feedback

Commercial

- Shop
- Venue hire
- Picture library

Work with us

- The Gallery nationwide
- Jobs

Credit Suisse
Partner of the National Gallery

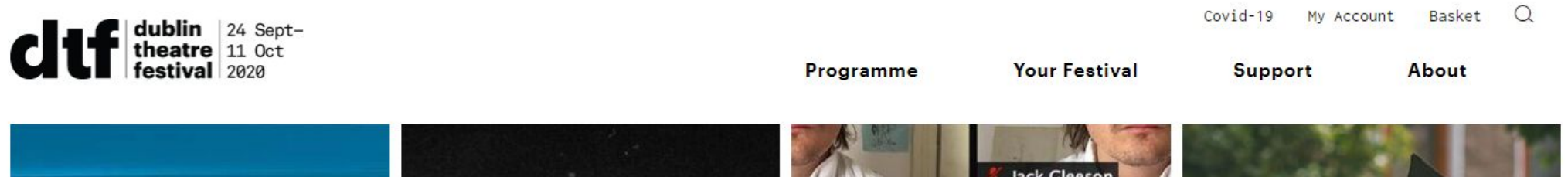
[Accessibility](#) [Privacy policy](#) [Cookies](#) [Website terms of use](#)

The email signup page for the UK's National Gallery. It does a nice job of highlighting the benefits of signing up

Ease of navigation

*Ensuring that users can
find their way around your
website without friction*

Your site's navigation bar



The navigation bar on the Dublin Theatre Festival site is nicely clear and easy to use

Your website's navigation bar helps your users find the content that is relevant to them.

- Don't cause cognitive overload: limit the top menu items to between 4 and 7
- You can use drop-down menus where necessary
- Put the visitor first: look at your site Analytics data and see what content people are most likely to visit. The site navigation should reflect user needs, not internal organisational structure.
- Use clear labelling: no jargon or internal terms
- Check how your site navigation looks in mobile

Accessibility



Accessibility

Accessibility means ensuring that people with sight issues can still use your website. Sight issues can cover everything from full to partial blindness.

Colour blindness is more common than many people realise: approximately 1 in 12 men have some kind of colour blindness.



Best practice

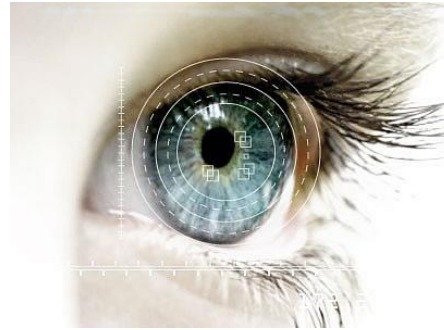
Best practices for accessibility will also benefit non-impaired users of your site, and will help your site's search engine performance:

- Text should be clear - plain typefaces, plenty of white space
- Add [alt tags](#) to images
- Don't rely solely on colour
- Ensure you use high contrast in your color palettes

Web-friendly content

*Setting up content for
reading on screens*

Reading on screens



People do not read carefully on screens:
they scan.

It's really important to set up your web content so that it makes sense to scanners.



Because screens are different to printed media, reading behaviour is different. Screens and print are separate media and have different conventions.

It's not a good idea to take content that was produced for print and copy and paste it onto your website. It will need a review and some editing to make it web-friendly.

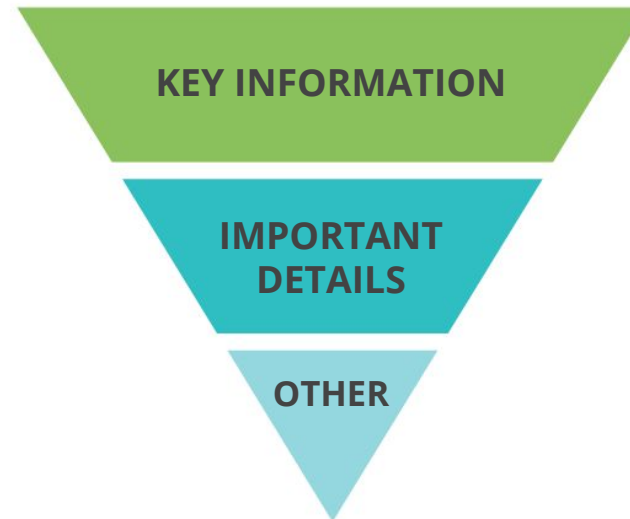
Set up each page with the most important information at the top

Because people do not read carefully online, you need to make sure that each page is set up to facilitate scanning.

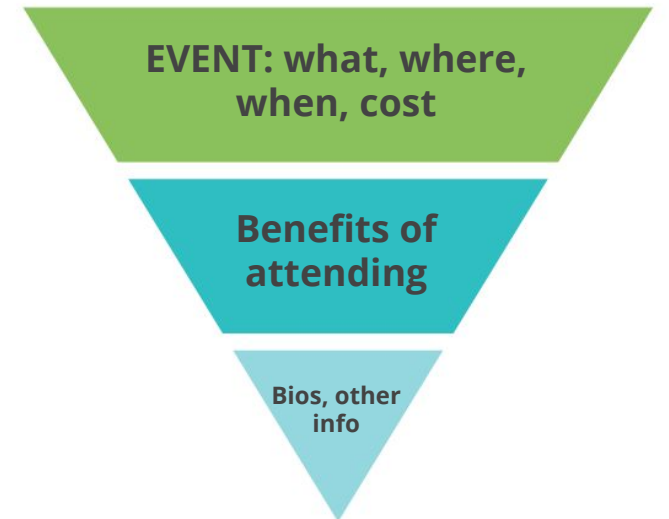
The key takeaway should be at the top of the page.

After the key takeaway, include important details - such as the benefit of attending an event, or supporting a fundraising appeal. Focus on the audience and their needs rather than the organisation.

You can then add any supporting information.



Structure your web pages like this



Recommended structure for an event page

Web-friendly formatting

Digital Charity Lab has a [free guide to web content & formatting](#)

Use headings and subheadings

Break up your text with headings and subheadings.

- Bullet points are a great way to make text readable
- Keep paragraphs and sentences short
- Use minimum 16 point font, and use generous line spacing. It's best to ask your web designer to set this as the default across the entire site.

Measurement

Measurement of your website is crucial for understanding what digital channels are working best for you

Why measurement matters

It's absolutely crucial that you are measuring your digital activities and the performance of your website: having this information will guide you in prioritising and resourcing your digital marketing activities.



Engagement

You can measure the engagement of your website visitors by checking how much time they spend on your site, and how many pages they look at.

If your visitors are only spending a few seconds on a page, that would suggest that there's an issue with the page and it needs reviewing. The content may not be relevant to the audience, or the page may be slow to load.

If people are not clicking through your site, that would suggest your site navigation and calls to action need some improvement.



Goals

By setting up conversion goals on Analytics, you can learn hugely valuable information about the performance of your website.

Conversion rate means the percentage of people who completed a call to action after seeing it. If conversion rates are low on actions like your donation form or your ticket sales, that would suggest that you need to review these pages and make sure they're clear and easy to use.

This is very much worth doing: it's much cheaper and quicker to convert the audience that is already on your site, than to acquire a completely new supporter.



Channels

Analytics will also let you review and compare your different digital channels. This data will tell you which channels are driving the most engaged and interested visitors, and which are driving the highest number and value of conversions.

Google Analytics & Tag Manager



Google Analytics should already be installed on your website. If it's not, ask your web agency to install it immediately.

Analytics automatically tracks visitors on your website and gives you all kinds of useful information about the time they spend on your site, the pages they visit, etc.

'Goals' can be set up to track specific conversions on your website, such as making a donation, buying a ticket or signing up for email.

If your site has cash transactions (donations, merch, tickets), ask your agency to install Ecommerce tracking on Analytics, which will capture the value of each transaction.



Tag Manager allows you to track online 'events', like sharing to social media or playing videos. It can also hold third party tracking such as the Facebook Pixel.

Tag Manager can be used to install Analytics too. Ask your web agency about getting it set up on your site.

Sample Analytics channels report

<input type="checkbox"/>	Default Channel Grouping	Acquisition			Behavior			Conversions eCommerce ▾		
		Users [?] ↓	New Users [?]	Sessions [?]	Bounce Rate [?]	Pages / Session [?]	Avg. Session Duration [?]	Ecommerce Conversion Rate [?]	Transactions [?]	Revenue [?]
		17,886 % of Total: 100.00% (17,886)	16,129 % of Total: 100.07% (16,117)	23,740 % of Total: 100.00% (23,740)	67.25% Avg for View: 67.25% (0.00%)	2.81 Avg for View: 2.81 (0.00%)	00:02:54 Avg for View: 00:02:54 (0.00%)	0.30% Avg for View: 0.30% (0.00%)	72 % of Total: 100.00% (72)	€2,140.00 % of Total: 100.00% (€2,140.00)
<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Organic Search	7,779 (42.36%)	7,039 (43.64%)	9,589 (40.39%)	70.10%	2.32	00:02:12	0.22%	21 (29.17%)	€325.00 (15.19%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Direct	3,596 (19.58%)	3,484 (21.60%)	4,743 (19.98%)	60.51%	3.70	00:04:06	0.34%	16 (22.22%)	€1,015.00 (47.43%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Email	2,936 (15.99%)	2,059 (12.77%)	4,578 (19.28%)	55.11%	3.82	00:04:40	0.61%	28 (38.89%)	€600.00 (28.04%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	4. (Other)	1,628 (8.86%)	1,552 (9.62%)	1,726 (7.27%)	95.65%	1.06	00:00:06	0.00%	0 (0.00%)	€0.00 (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Paid Search	1,268 (6.90%)	1,104 (6.84%)	1,535 (6.47%)	75.96%	2.00	00:01:11	0.07%	1 (1.39%)	€0.00 (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Social	767 (4.18%)	608 (3.77%)	957 (4.03%)	74.29%	2.11	00:02:02	0.21%	2 (2.78%)	€0.00 (0.00%)
<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Referral	391 (2.13%)	283 (1.75%)	612 (2.58%)	52.61%	3.98	00:05:04	0.65%	4 (5.56%)	€200.00 (9.35%)

A channels report from a real organisation. This shows that Organic Search is sending the highest number of visitors, but that direct traffic and email are driving more transactions on the website. The Behavior section shows that visitors from email and referral (i.e. links on other sites) spend the most time on the site.

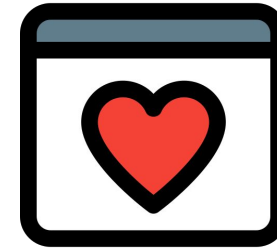
How conversion tracking works

There are many ways to measure conversions; one of the most common is to measure progress from a call to action page to a confirmation page.



Call to action page

Measure how many people view this page



Thank you page

Measure the number that move on to the next step, and also calculate it as a percentage of the first step - this is your conversion rate.

As highlighted in the section on landing pages: this is a good place to ask people to take a secondary action.

Security and compliance

*Keeping your site visitors
and your organisation safe*

Security and compliance requirements for your site

Security certificate

It is recommended now that all sites have a security certificate: a quick way to check if your website has one is to copy and paste your site url from a browser, and check that it starts with **https://**.

If you don't have one, it can be purchased from your web hosters and they can install it for you; they cost approx. €30 per year.

Google now penalises sites without security certificates in its search ranking, and browsers give warnings to users about sites that don't have security. It's crucial that you have one on your website.

Privacy policy

This is another crucial requirement for your website. Your privacy policy should explain all the ways you are gathering and handling your website visitors' data. This should include:

- If you're using the Facebook Pixel and any other tracking code
- How you manage email subscriptions and customer data
- How people can opt out of your communications

You can use an online generator or template to create your privacy policy; once drafted, it should be checked by a data protection expert.

Risk

Not having these items puts you at risk in many ways, including website hacks and data breaches.

Data protection complaints are extremely time-consuming to deal with, so it's well worth investing some time in ensuring your data protection practices and notices are fully compliant.

Search engine optimisation

*Giving your site the best
chance to perform on
Google*

Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Statistics from
[SmartInsights.com](https://www.smartinsights.com)

68%

of all website traffic comes from search engines.

40%

is 'organic', or unpaid - the remainder is from search ads.

70%

of these searches happen on Google. Devices used include desktops, mobiles and voice devices such as Google Home.

About search traffic

Search engine traffic is highly valuable - searchers are not idly browsing, they have high intent and are looking for something specific.

Google search is an excellent channel for delivering an engaged, interested audience to your website; and you don't have to pay for this channel.

Try to give some time to search engine optimisation. Run an SEO check on your website and see what improvements can be applied.

Apply best practice for web content writing for all the content you publish: this will also benefit your performance in search engines.

Keyword research

Get into the habit of doing keyword research each time you write a new piece of content for your website. This is a quick and easy task that can be done in about 10 minutes, and which will greatly benefit the performance of the page.

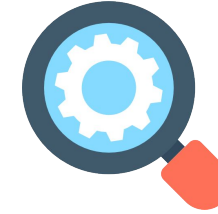


Why keyword research matters

By doing keyword research, you will learn if there's an audience out there for your content. There might not be! There are some topics that don't get many searches. If this is the case, you'll know that you need to create interest in this content through other channels.

Keyword research will tell you the precise terms people are using to search. You may find they use different terminology than you do, and this is very useful intelligence to have. It can also help to generate ideas for new content that your website needs.

By finding and using keywords in your content, you increase the chances of your pages performing well in Google search results.



Keyword research tools

If you're using Google Ads, you can use the Keyword Planner tool in your account. It's an excellent tool that will give you a lot of data about keywords.

Other keyword research tools:

- Keywordtool.io
- Google Trends
- Answerthepublic.com
- Google's autocomplete - just start typing a phrase and note the related terms that Google suggests

Website improvement checklist

*Specific activities to carry
out on your website*

Checklist for optimising your website

Print out this checklist and work through it with your web agency to apply a range of improvements to your website. If you only have time to focus on a few, the recommended priority items are highlighted with stars.

	Measurement & tracking		Calls to action		Web content	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Google Analytics installed	★	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ask web agency to develop landing page template		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set up goal tracking for key actions	★	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create landing pages for top priority actions	★	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Install Google Tag Manager		<input type="checkbox"/>	Create a standalone page for email signups	★	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set reminder to regularly check the Channels report in Analytics		<input type="checkbox"/>	Add priority call to action button to top navigation menu	★	
	Search engine optimisation			Navigation & accessibility		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use seositecheckup.com to evaluate site		<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate if navigation menu can be improved		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Apply fixes from SEO site check		<input type="checkbox"/>	Check alt tags are present in images on important pages		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Run a Page Speed Insights test					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Apply Page Speed fixes					
					Security & compliance	
					<input type="checkbox"/> Get security certificate installed	★
					<input type="checkbox"/> Develop and publish privacy policy	

Useful resources

Tools for evaluating your website

- [SEOSiteCheckup.com](https://seositecheckup.com)
- [Google's Page Speed Insights](https://pagespeed.google.dev)

Search engine optimisation

[Moz.com's beginner's guide to SEO](https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo)

Design & user experience

[Boagworld](https://boagworld.com) - useful articles on accessibility, best practice for landing pages, calls to action, and much more.

Web content

- [Copyblogger.com](https://copyblogger.com)
- Digital Charity Lab's [guide to web content, and a customisable web style guide](#) - free to download

Thank you!

Copyright:

O’Kennedy Consulting
& Jean O’Brien

*The content in this guide
cannot be reproduced or
distributed in another format
without the express
permission of the copyright
holders.*

Icons from flaticon.com

Your feedback:

*We would love to hear your
feedback on this guide, and
your suggestions for future
additions.*

Send your feedback to:

hello@jeanobrien.com
&
info@okennedyconsulting.ie