Small Non-Profit Website and Social Media Efficacy

Juliana Maria Leprich
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ABSTRACT

SMALL NON-PROFIT WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA EFFICACY

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Northern Illinois University, 2019
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This thesis examines the website design and social media platform usage of small non-profit organizations (defined as less than $1M operating budget and less than ten staff). This research will be completed by first reviewing other studies that have been done on marketing in the non-profit sector, then by exploring marketing challenges firsthand through a mini-ethnographic case study as described in the mini-ethnographic case study approach, and finally through the examination of tax and financial data provided by Guidestar. The researcher was involved in website collaboration with The Gracie Center in a volunteer capacity and was employed with the two other organizations that are the focus of this study (Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association and International Association of Diecutting and Diemaking). The websites of these three organizations are analyzed through a template tool created by one of the most popular Membership Management Software (MMS) companies. The researcher also explores the social media marketing done by the three non-profits in this study. Ultimately, this thesis offers some suggestions for the usage and design of the websites and social mediums of these specific organizations and, in turn, offers some universal suggestions for any non-profit organization which is similar in size and resources to those mentioned in this study.
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DE KALB, IL

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SMALL NON-PROFIT WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA EFFICACY

BY

JULIANA MARIA LEPRICH

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

Thesis Director:

Laura Vazquez
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Due to their very nature, small non-profits (less than $1M operating budget and less than ten staff) can face substantial challenges when it comes to budgeting and spending. Justifying expenditures that appear non-essential or auxiliary are likely to receive scrutiny from a variety of stakeholders. Many individuals interested in contributing to a non-profit (such as volunteers, donors, prospective donors, members, etc.) may not understand why a non-profit oftentimes needs to participate in non-mission spending to be successful. One major expenditure that can be perceived as undesirable spending within non-profits is monies allocated for public relations and marketing. Due to the pressure to not spend in this area, non-profits may limit outreach efforts for fear of appearing frivolous with donor money or simply because there are so many other mission driven tasks that are seemingly higher priority. Oftentimes, however, this either outwardly imposed or self-imposed limitation is a hindrance to the success of the non-profit’s mission. The good news for non-profits, even those with a non-existent promotional budget, is that there are two types of marketing tools that, if used properly, these tools can get non-profits right to their desired audiences, are cost-effective and user friendly, and require minimal maintenance after the initial setup: websites and social media.

Much of the recent research on non-profit organizations was conducted at the onset of social mediums, so this thesis seeks to provide an updated and targeted perspective. This thesis will also identify how non-profit organizations can best use online media (websites and social media platforms) to reach their desired audience (donors, members, volunteers, etc.) and some of the limitations that go along with these mediums. Lastly, after the critical analyses of these websites and social media platforms, the researcher hopes this thesis will serve as a guidance tool for employees of similarly sized non-profits as those highlighted in the case studies.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Hansmann (1980), “a non-profit organization is, in essence, an organization that is barred from distributing its net earnings, if any, to individuals who exercise control over it, such as members, officers, directors, or trustees.” He also notes that although non-profits are technically not banned from making a profit, they are banned from distributing that profit between “owning” members. Unlike a traditional business which has partners, non-profit governance is usually comprised of an executive board (which can be either elected by organization members or appointed) and an executive director. The executive director (or in some cases a CEO) may earn a salary and the non-profit may have paid employees, but if the non-profit makes any profit beyond these salaries, the money must go back into the non-profit’s mission for its non-profit status to be retained.

Additionally, there are various types of non-profits. Not only can these organizations have different missions and demographics they serve, but legally there are different tax-exempt statuses that a non-profit can obtain based on an organization’s goals and purpose. The National Council of Non-profits breaks down the types of non-profits based on tax exempt status on their website. Groups are tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3) as "public charities" because they are formed to provide "public benefit." Community foundations are also part of this group (and so are private foundations, although tax rules treat them a bit differently than public charities.) There are actually 29 types of organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c), including chambers of commerce and other business leagues, exempt under 501(c)(6), and state-chartered credit unions, which are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(14). These organizations are exempt from certain taxes because of the contributions they make in the
community. However, only 501(c)(3) groups will provide donors with a tax-deduction for their contribution.

Non-profit organizations can have missions that stem from varied social and professional issues and can be found within many different tiers of community (local, state, national, international). To further illustrate their importance, it is important to note that non-profit organizations had seen a 2% growth in employment since the 1980s within the non-profit sector, according to Saxton and Benton (2005). As non-profit organizations become an increasingly established sector of the employment market, it is important to study how their marketing efforts contribute to their overall success.

When it comes to marketing, most non-profit organizations engage in numerous activities that are very similar to the marketing activities of their for-profit peers (Hunt, 1976). These marketing efforts can range from print marketing, to outreach events, to (the intention of this study) online marketing.

To this end, a study conducted by Pope, Isely, and Asamoa-Tutu (2009) found that, “traditional marketing strategies are not well-adapted to meeting the goals of NPOs (non-profit organizations). Because NPOs are not motivated by the financial bottom line, these for-profit strategies fall short in helping NPOs reach out to their three main marketing focus areas: clients, volunteers, and donors or funders” (p. 194-195). They also suggested that a new nationally recognized marketing strategy needs to be created for non-profits specifically because of their unique challenges and patronage. They claim that the ideal marketing strategy will be highly in tune with the needs of the clients that the non-profit seeks to serve.

Of particular relevance, all of the interview subjects in the aforementioned study, and 77.6% of the survey respondents had websites for their non-profits; however, according to Pope,
Isely, and Asamo-Tutu, none of the respondents were using these websites to their fullest potential. Most only used their websites to provide contact information for the organization or basic background information. Few used the donation or interactive functions of the websites. According to Taylor, Kent and White (2001) websites play a critical role for non-profits as a primary resource for communicating with and responding to stakeholder groups. Not only do websites serve as a point of information for donors and other stakeholders, but many times a non-profit’s website is a heavily relied on tool for marketing/outreach. While businesses frequently have an individual, if not an entire team, committed specifically to marketing, small non-profits frequently have one person working on many outreach tasks, with marketing being just one of the numerous assignments in their job description. Other times, marketing is spearheaded by a volunteer. That being said, a website may be that non-profit’s main paid marketing platform, so making it comprehensive and user-friendly is absolutely essential.

Yeon, Choi, and Kiousis (2007) completed a content analysis of 98 non-profit websites to look at how non-profits use their websites as a public relations tool and to determine whether non-profit organizations’ revenues are positively correlated with the presence and prominence of their media relations, donor relations, and volunteer relations efforts online. They found that 83.7% of the organizations that they studied had some sort of press area on their website. This press area included news releases, archived text materials, and annual reports. They ascertained that these organizations received better media coverage and had more abundant information on the website overall. Additionally, they found that organization’s donor relations and volunteer relations pages were generally prominent on the websites they analyzed. Interestingly though, they found that donor pages were more likely to be present than volunteer pages, implying that donors are often a non-profit’s primary audience online. This makes sense from a revenue
perspective. Many non-profit organizations could function without volunteers, but none could effectively pursue their mission without funding.

Based on the aforementioned research, it is clear that there is a great need for non-profits to develop a better understanding of the different tools that they should be utilizing on their websites to gain maximum return on investment. The time of non-profit staff and volunteers is valuable. Using these press, donor, and/or volunteer pages on their website or providing specific information related to these key audiences may lead to an increase in website interaction. Much of the extensive research on what non-profits are doing with their websites was from the early to mid-2000s. This is troublesome because this past research states time and time again that there is a disconnect with how non-profit organizations are engaging with the public online versus their marketing goals, but it seems as though there has not been much of an update to this research as non-profit audiences have become increasingly present in the digital world.

In addition to using websites as a marketing tool, social media is incredibly important for non-profit organizations. When looking at non-profits and social media, there is a greater breadth of timely research analyzing how non-profits use social media on a global scale. Many studies have looked at donor outreach and general usage as a PR marketing tool. These studies include a variety of research methods and areas of focus that serve as a comprehensive foundation to the field of non-profit social media research.

Through performing a content analysis Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas (2009) found that nearly all organizations of the 275 that they studied listed the administrators of their Facebook profiles (97%) and provided a description of the organization (96%), while fewer than half provided a mission statement or history of the organization. This is important to consider, because non-profits are expected to be transparent and forthcoming with all organizational
information. While listing the people involved is important, the key tenets of the mission statement and history are the aspects of an organization that inspire potential volunteers or donors to take that next step. Additionally, because non-profit organizations have limited marketing capital, the full and complete use of Facebook would only make sense as Facebook marketing is, for the most part, free.

In the same vein, the researchers also found that only 44% of the organizations studied posted news announcements on their profiles and even fewer used the multimedia tools available. Of the organizations that did use the multimedia tools, Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas found that photographs were the most utilized media. While photographs can be effective for sharing information about an organization, videos have the ability to tell so much more of the story. The lack of in-depth information on these Facebook pages is troubling, because many stakeholders go to social media in addition to or instead of a website to learn about an organization. This lack of information suggests that non-profits don’t see the value in educating their audience through social media.

Additionally, Waters, Burnett, Lamm, and Lucas found that 71% of the non-profits listed contact email addresses, but only 13% had a donation outlet and listed volunteer opportunities. Even fewer offered a calendar of events or an e-commerce store. They also found that fundraising on Facebook was used by 22% of educational organizations and 26% of healthcare organizations, compared to the 13% average for all non-profit organizations studied. Based on this study, non-profits are not making adequate use of the online marketplace/fundraising tools that Facebook offers. Because finances are such a prominent concern for non-profits, it would be advantageous to use this free tool to increase their incoming donations, even if the yield isn’t
incredibly high (according to Facebook, 100% of the donations raised through Facebook go to the charity raising the funds).

When looking at social media based donors, Saxton and Wang (2014) also found that donations made through social media are made based upon the social network effect (more friends equates to more donations) instead of economic factors (such as donor income). Additionally, they found that Facebook donors tend to give smaller donations. Specifically looking at the crowdfunding application on Facebook (Facebook Causes) they determined that non-profits were able to use this application to engage new, larger, and younger audiences in a cost-effective manner. Looking at a previous case study from the March of Dimes’ “Walk for Babies” campaign, Saxton and Wang explained that March of Dimes was able to increase the revenues for their event by 102% as a result of social media efforts and used this figure as the foundation for their study. In their study, they also found that fundraising success is related to an organization’s “Web capacity.” Web capacity is based not only on the number of social media outlets that an organization has, but also the organizational capacity and industry focus. An organization with a larger number of employees in a more specialized industry has a greater web capacity. This means that a non-profit organization with fewer employees and a more localized scope could have a greater web capacity than an international non-profit with hundreds of employees; in this case the smaller non-profit can reach its target audience more effectively because the audience is much smaller and the non-profit has greater ease of getting to a large percentage of their audience, especially if their employees are highly connected with their audience.

Lastly, they found that online donors are prone to contribute to certain categories of causes more than others. Causes that are more immediate, like health issues or disasters, tend to
garner more donations than other types of causes on social media. Saxton and Wang’s research is useful because it looks at who non-profits are attracting to their social media pages and how their posts inspire donors and volunteers. If non-profits can show urgency in their posts expressing need (donations, volunteers, etc.) they can more quickly attract support.

While Facebook is an important tool for non-profits, many also turn to Twitter to engage with their stakeholders. According to Guo and Saxton (2014), they conducted the first study which looks at the extent to which non-profit advocacy organizations are effective in grabbing their audiences’ attention through social media channels. Additionally, they looked at the impact of social media message strategies on an organizational level. For their study, they examined 219,915 tweets sent by 145 organizations in 2013 on Twitter and they keyed for retweets and number of favorites. They hypothesized that the number of tweets and followers an organization has positively impacts the attention that organization receives. Other variables, such as the number of likes, hashtags, URLs, and user mentions, were also associated with the attention an organization received. Interestingly, they also keyed for visual content in posts. There are a number of ways videos and photos can be shared on Twitter, so they chose to key for each of those different ways. Like their previous hypotheses, they determined that the higher number of visual components generated by a non-profit, the greater attention that organization would receive.

Ultimately, they found that different types of tweets varied in how much they impacted the attention of a non-profit organization. Retweets from the organization tended to be more likely to be retweeted by a different user, whereas original content received more favorites. This is interesting, because depending of the content of the tweets, retweets can actually be far more useful. Retweets disseminate the information to other users, while favorites simply show support.
While both types of tweets received positive attention, each type received different responses. Retweets are asking others to take action through consciously putting the information in front of one’s followers, while favorites may or may not cause one’s followers to see they support the tweet or the organization. They also found that tweets with a visual element were more likely to be favored. This study is useful because it looks at the effectiveness of adding visual content, which can be incorporated into any type of non-profit online marketing.

In their content analysis Lovejoy, Waters, and Saxton (2012) were interested in determining whether Twitter’s communication tools were actively being used by non-profits. While they were interested in studying the top 100 non-educational US non-profit organizations, only 73 of the desired organizations had a Twitter presence.

[S]avvy organizations are able to bypass the character restriction to present detailed information through the use of hyperlinks, to construct replies to public messages that demonstrate responsiveness to constituent concerns, to facilitate rapid diffusion of information by retweeting messages, to build information communities and aid in Twitter searches by using hashtags, and to share multimedia files... (p.320).

The key here is the term “savvy organizations”. They went on to explain that most non-profits are still using Twitter primarily to simply post information without engaging in an interactive dialogue.

While many studies looked at the effects of social media on non-profit donor and volunteer bases, Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) were interested in how social media (specifically Twitter) impacted non-profit organizational communication as a tool to build community, inspire action, and relay information. Although most tweets that they analyzed did serve an informational function (59%), a fairly substantial number of tweets (26%) served a community building function. The categories of tweets that made up community building were: Giving recognition and thanks; Acknowledgement of current & local events; Responses to public reply
messages; and Response Solicitation. While community building is important for a non-profit’s mission, Lovejoy and Saxton determine that the Information-Community-Action categories could represent a powerful hierarchy of engagement on Twitter.

Information could be seen as a core activity to attract followers, Community-focused messages serve to bind and engage a following of users, and Action-oriented messages serve to mobilize the resource—that is, the community—that has been developed through informational and community-oriented communication (p. 350).

The Information category should exist in a synergistic relationship with Community and Action if a non-profit truly wants to be successful in the Twittersphere.

Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K., and Sweetser, K. D. (2010) looked at how non-profits use social media tools in general. They also looked at if these non-profits on social media were viewed as credible. They did an online survey with responses on a Likert scale, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology. From the 2043 surveys they sent out, they received 409 responses. About 55% of their respondents used social media. This was surprising because, even though the survey was done in 2010, it seems that social media should have been much more widely used at that time. The thing relevant to this research that the study found was that non-profits with a PR department were more likely to have social media pages. Generally, this research suggests that social media (online marketing) is widely used and that it plays a part in the success of a non-profit’s marketing efforts.

Based upon the current research, two things are clear when analyzing the effectiveness of a non-profit organization’s digital marketing. The first is that an effective website will be in tune with the needs of the clients or members that the non-profit seeks to serve, with plentiful information available to the potential donor or prospective member. The non-profit website
should not only seek to inform, but should seek to inspire action, as it is likely the first thing that a prospective donor or volunteer will see if looking online to learn about the organization.

Additionally, using social media as a tool for meaningful interaction with people of interest (donors, volunteers, members, etc.), will be key in creating a strong virtual presence and in marketing the mission of the non-profit organization. Facebook and Twitter offer many free tools that non-profits need to pay attention to. These mediums also offer a powerful platform for visual storytelling and give non-profits the opportunity to connect with potential donors and volunteers on a much more personal level. Information presented on social media can be quick and easy, but also targeted. The informality of social media allows followers a more “real” look into the world of that non-profit. They can see real time videos of what the non-profit staff is up to or what their donation is being used for. Social media bridges the gap between the formal website and the in-person connection.
CHAPTER 2: METHOD

For context, this project will include research on the background of non-profits, specifically looking at their outreach challenges. In addition to the written portion of this thesis project, there will also be a multimedia case study for three different non-profit organizations. These case studies will take the form of website creation or collaboration and analysis for each of the non-profit organizations. The purpose of analyzing these websites and collecting additional information (gathered in the literature review and additional research), will allow the researcher to create a template for any small non-profit organization to reference when establishing or enhancing their digital presence. The organizations that have been selected for the case study are a vocational non-profit for adults with disabilities, The Gracie Center, located in Kingston, IL, as well as two trade associations; the Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association (IMHCA) in DeKalb, IL, and the International Association of Diecutting and Diemaking (IADD) in Crystal Lake, IL. Though the researcher was only able to have creative liberty on the website design for one of the three organizations that are being analyzed, she was involved in the marketing efforts and website updates of the other two.

The researcher will use the “The 22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” guide created by non-profit MMS, Wild Apricot to analyze these websites. Wild Apricot is a very popular software and website creation tool within the non-profit industry and is even used by IMHCA for their web design and maintenance needs. Wild Apricot is a great resource for a template as they are incredibly prevalent in the non-profit community, boasting 11,499 paid customers and a number one MMS ranking for six consecutive years. The list of 22 traits of successful non-profits websites was created after a team of Wild Apricot employees analyzed hundreds of top non-profit websites and interviewed dozens of website administrators.
The 22 features include: 9 Design Elements that Engage Website Visitors, 9 Website Pages Every Non-profit Needs to Attract Members and Donors, and 4 Ways to Optimize Your Website to Convert Members and Donors. The 9 Design Elements that Engage Website Visitors are: an easy-to-read layout, a friendly/welcoming design (which is defined as attractive color schemes and eye catching images), high-quality imagery, simple/hi-contrast font, a great logo, an easy-to-find search box, a big join or donate button, a clear call to action, and concise copywriting which motivates action. The 9 Website Pages Every Non-profit Needs to Attract Members and Donors are: a homepage, about us page, join us page, donate page, an events page, a news/blog area, a resources page (if applicable), a members-only area (if applicable), and a contact us page. Lastly, the 4 Ways to Optimize Your Website to Convert Members and Donors are: design that responds to or can be viewed differently on desktop, mobile and tablet, adding a personalized touch to all communication, website popups, and A/B testing (which involves collecting data from web visitors on their responses to changes on the website). In addition to simply noting whether or not the organizations in the case studies have these components on their websites or not, the researcher will determine whether or not these components are being used effectively. Many of these components will be present due to simple necessity but may not actually be doing anything in terms of inspiring action (donation of time or money).

In addition to looking at these website components, the researcher will also analyze the social media used by each organization by looking at platforms used and frequency of posts. The researcher will specifically be looking at the presence of and frequency of use of the top four social media networks used by non-profits. Based upon a HubSpot survey of small-to-medium non-profits in the U.S., these networks are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. When looking at social media, the researcher will use the data collected to state whether or not each
organization is using their social media effectively and will offer suggestions on how to improve social media efforts.

Through analyzing the two distinct areas of website design and social media from these three case studies the researcher will be able to do two things: present suggestions to the three non-profits that are studied for specific things they can do to improve their websites and social media marketing, and, most importantly, present a template for any small non-profit to reference when attempting to create or improve their website or social media platforms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>The Gracie Center</th>
<th>IMHCA</th>
<th>IADD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy-to-read layout</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friendly/welcoming design</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>High-quality imagery</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simple/hi-contrast font</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great logo</td>
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<td>Easy-to-find search box</td>
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<td>Big join or donate button</td>
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<td>Clear call to action</td>
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<td>Concise copywriting</td>
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<td>Donate page</td>
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<td>Events page</td>
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<td>News/blog area</td>
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<td>Resources page (if applicable)</td>
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<td>Members-only area (if applicable)</td>
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<td>YouTube</td>
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The above table contains data collected from the three non-profit organizations. The table provides a breakdown of the criteria established in “The 22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” as well as the social media presence of the top four utilized social mediums, as identified in “Where Non-profits Spend Their Time With Social Media Marketing”.

Finally, through examining the websites and social media of the selected non-profits, the researcher will answer two research questions.

Q1. Are non-profit organizations designing their websites and using social media based upon industry recommendations?

Q2. What can non-profit organizations (especially those with limited budgets) do to maximize their digital media marketing efforts?
CHAPTER 3: CASE STUDIES

THE GRACIE CENTER (https://www.thegraciecenter.org)

According to their website, “The Gracie Center supports adults with developmental disabilities to reach their highest potential through innovative collaboration with staff, families, and communities. [Their] goal is for all adults with developmental disabilities to be genuinely appreciated and fully integrated into their communities.”

The Gracie Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit which, again, is a classification that means the organization is a public charity and was formed to provide public benefit. The Gracie Center offers a number of vocational programs that teach business skills, including a travelling popcorn stand run by center participants. The organization recently (in 2017) took on its first paid staff to assist with organizing and supervising the various vocational opportunities. Up until that point all people involved in the organization were volunteers and board members. The Gracie Center is headquartered at the Kingston Friendship Center in Kingston, IL, and serves adults with developmental disabilities in DeKalb County. The researcher was a volunteer with The Gracie Center, specifically tasked with updating the website from a previous version to what is reviewed in this thesis. While the researcher had creative freedom, she was limited to what the Wix template tool allowed and did meet regularly with a Gracie Center Board Member and the Founder to get feedback on website updates. The researcher was given little freedom in the final website design.

Though The Gracie Center arguably has the most limited financial means, their website still hit many of the marks suggested in Wild Apricot’s “The 22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has”. A site map and screen grabs for The Gracie Center can be found below.
The Gracie Center

PROGRAMS
Functional Skills Program
The Functional Skills Program runs on Wednesdays and includes a variety of skill building that can enhance many aspects of the client’s individual abilities: communication skills, social skills, independent living, and community involvement. This program is designed to be a step towards independence and can be tailored to meet the individual’s needs and goals.

Vocational Skills Program
The Vocational Skills Program is a core weekly session during which clients work on developing vocational and business skills. They are taught about workplace expectations, job interviews, and how to maintain employment. This program helps clients prepare for employment by developing their work skills and job readiness.

ABOUT
MISSION
To support adults with developmental disabilities in Dauphin County to achieve a greater sense of independence and quality of life.

VISION
The Gracie Center supports adults with developmental disabilities to reach their highest potential through innovative collaboration with staff, families, and communities. Our goal is for all adults with developmental disabilities to be genuinely appreciated and fully integrated into their communities.

STORY
Every business begins with a dream and The Gracie Center is no different. It was born of a conversation “open to anyone who is interested” by a family Christmas dinner. A mom of an exceptional child said to be around who understands, was asked “what happens after high school?”

The mom shared with her dream for her child’s future—a place that would allow this child to continue to do what he loved most, the shop and the people; the child’s ability to work, make friends, and most importantly, give back to his community.

The Gracie Center is the realization of a dream that started with that family Christmas dinner. A place designed to support people with disabilities in reaching their potential, building friendships, experiences, and partnerships with our community.

The Gracie Center is dedicated to creating a place where individuals can pursue their dreams, develop new skills, and contribute to their community.
While The Gracie Center’s website layout is somewhat simple at first glance, it isn’t very easy to read from a conventional left-to-right standpoint. The key focal point of the homepage is the center of the page. The subsequent pages do not all follow the same format. The one thing that The Gracie Center has done well in this regard is the location of where they are asking for support on the website. Based upon the recommendation by Wild Apricot, the “JOIN NOW” or “DONATE” button should be located at the top right of a non-profit website for maximum exposure.

From a design perspective, The Gracie Center has truly embraced purple as their organization’s “color”. This is because purple is Grace, the namesake of the organization’s, favorite color. However, they use a variety of shades of purple throughout the website that are not complementary to one another. It would be more visually pleasing if they used the same color throughout their website.

Additionally, the different tab sizes and shapes on the homepage are jarring. They also do not use people in the photos on their homepage and, according to Wild Apricot, using people in photos can increase engagement. This is a simple fix, especially because their mission is focused around helping a specific group of people. They do have pictures with program participants and volunteers on other webpages, but by not having these on the homepage they are not taking advantage of using that human connection as soon as possible. The photos sprinkled throughout their website are high quality. If webpage visitors do enough digging to get to the pages that photos are on, they will see photos that appear crisp and are illustrative of the page’s topic.

Some of the graphics, however, are hard to make out and could benefit from being larger or higher quality. The Gracie Center uses a variety of fonts throughout their website. While there is one main san serif font used primarily (Arial), there is a number of other fonts used without
clear reason. It would be beneficial for them to go through and use one specific font throughout for consistency. Though their logo is somewhat complicated, and the text is difficult to read, they do have it in their header and use it in many materials on their website. It would be advisable for them to use a simpler version of the logo, but the fact that they have a logo present throughout is a great start.

The Gracie Center website has no search box. Website visitors have to dig around to find what they are looking for on this website. The donate and volunteer opportunities are hidden away under the “Support” and “Opportunities” tabs, respectively. Potential donors or volunteers coming to the website may give up on donating or requesting volunteer information before even making it to those pages because the information is not easily accessible.

There is, however, a clear call to action. The Gracie Center has an upcoming event (this appears to be a new fundraiser) that they are highlighting on the homepage of their website. It is clear that they want website visitors to attend this event. However, there is really no urgency created by the copywriting of the website. Much of the language around actions is passive and somewhat awkward, such as phrases like “Are you interested in ordering popcorn? You can email us at info@thegraciecenter.org” or “If you are interested in helping our organization to grow, you can donate through PayPal below.” Phrasing like “Email us at info@thegraciecenter.org now to place your popcorn order and help our participants develop their vocational skills” or “Donate through PayPal today to help us grow The Gracie Center and serve more participants” would be more effective language. Using language that describes specifically what the donation or purchase would go toward is even more powerful.

The Gracie Center does have a distinct homepage with their main call to action on this page, but does not provide any news, highlights of featured members, upcoming events, or
pictures. They also have a comprehensive “ABOUT” page that includes their mission, vision, and has background information on the founding of the organization. There is, however, no one place to join The Gracie Center, but perhaps this is due to the fact that there are many ways to join (staff, volunteer, participant). That being said, they do provide the forms associated with each type of involvement on each page.

The place to donate on the website is, again, a bit obscure. The donation link is under the main support tab and is frankly a bit difficult to locate. Events page: The Gracie center does have an events page highlighting current and past events. There is no current news or blog section on The Gracie Center website. A resource page, though not necessary, would be very useful for The Gracie Center’s website visitors. They could have information on other community resources for adults with developmental disabilities. The Gracie Center contact page has basic contact information and provides website visitors with an easily fillable form.

The Gracie Center website is responsive, though it is quite overwhelming on mobile and tablet. It is hard to stay focused on what pictures and images are in what order and what the website visitor is supposed to hone in on as the most important information. Email communications sent from The Gracie Center are not integrated into the website in any way and no identifying information is retrieved from the website that would be useful to personalize email communications. The Gracie Center does not have website popups and does not perform A/B testing on their website to determine website or web tool effectiveness.

The Gracie Center only uses Facebook for their social media marketing. They post regularly (multiple times a week) and it appears that they mostly use Facebook to update their program participants on any schedule changes and to promote upcoming events.
Although looking at the websites and social media platforms of non-profits organizations can provide some insight on the organization’s marketing, analyzing said organization’s finances can help create a more complete picture of an organization’s marketing. Looking at the finances for each organization offers some interesting insight into the funds dedicated to advertising and self-promotion. While this line item may not be fully comprehensive of what an organization spends on their marketing efforts (i.e. web design and purchasing a domain could fall under office expenses or other expenses) it is a tangible indicator of how the organization is promoting itself externally.

The IRS requires that many non-profit organizations file an IRS Form 990 or a IRS Form 990-EZ. GuideStar, the world's largest source of information on non-profit organizations, houses millions of these submitted 990 forms for anyone to view, for free. As such, the researcher was able to access 990 form(s) for each organization in this study. A 990-form reads much like any tax document; there are line items for each type of income and deduction.

One limitation when looking to GuideStar for an organization’s financial information is that GuideStar is somewhat limited in scope. For some organizations there are not full records available (i.e. certain years’ files may be missing from the database). Considering this limitation, the researcher looked at each organization’s most recent 990 form(s) available on GuideStar.

The Gracie Center’s most recent IRS Form 990-N was from 2017. This is interesting, because The Gracie Center is not a 509(a)(3) supporting organization or a section 527 organization and its gross receipts are normally not more than $50,000 so they are not required to file an IRS Form 990 or a 990-EZ. Their filing of a 990-N was simply to report that the organization still grosses less than $50,000 annually. All that noted, The Gracie Center’s first and only comprehensive report is their inaugural 990-EZ from 2012, when the organization was
founded. In 2012, The Gracie Center spent $1,741 on advertising and promotion, which was a huge part of expenses that year, as their full expenses total was only $3,119. It is also of interest to note that The Gracie Center had no paid employees in 2012, so the listed amount for advertising and promotion is likely comprehensive for that year. It is unfortunate that more years were not available and that much of the information was likely undocumented.

THE ILLINOIS MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS ASSOCIATION (https://www.imhca.org)

The Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association (IMHCA) “functions to represent ALL Illinois counselors. [They] provide advocacy in Illinois with IDFPR (Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation. IMHCA is a founding member of CICO (Coalition of Illinois Counselors). CICO engages a Lobbyist in Springfield. Through [their] training Academy [they] provide an annual conference and a variety of training opportunities for mental health providers.”

In this organization, the researcher was employed as the Director of Marketing for approximately one year. Her duties were to design email marketing campaigns, create print and online marketing materials, and manage the organization’s social media accounts. Additionally, along with the rest of the office staff, she was involved in the creation of a new website for the organization. Though the researcher was able to give input on updating text for the website redesign, most of the actual design decisions were made by the organization’s director. A site map and screen grabs for IMCHA can be found below. The IMHCA website was updated using a template and is maintained through Wild Apricot.
IMHCA’s layout is very simple and easy to read and mostly follows the recommended “F-Layout” that is described in “The 22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” article. The “F-Layout” simply illustrates that the content on the homepage of a website should follow the shape of an “F” with the most important information in the upper left, followed by the viewer’s eye leading to the upper right and so on in the shape of an “F”. The left column of the homepage has information on the organization’s exhibitors and sponsors. While this information is important for the association, it is unlikely that, based on the association’s audience of therapists and counselors, that this information is what website visitors are looking for. The upcoming trainings or membership information should be the focus of the left side of the website if following the “F-Layout”. The design of the website lacks a number of components that would make it visitor friendly. The color scheme isn’t unattractive, yet a number of the banner graphics clash with the bright red color that is part of their color scheme. The design also has a lot of blank white space. The bright red color (#FF0000) is jarring against the white, as it is such a stark contrast. The placement of text and photos throughout the site is a bit haphazard. There are unused columns or rows that could be condensed to make a more compact design that fully utilizes all available space. Graphics and photos are high-quality. There are several images that aren’t necessary (i.e. an image of a generic graduation cap with a key sitting next to it on multiple pages of the website) that are high quality but seem out of place, especially because they are often placed randomly on the page. While IMHCA uses san-serif fonts throughout the website there are inconsistencies with which font is used where. There are sometimes 3-4 fonts present on one page, which would be distracting to the average viewer. While everything is still readable, the variety and selection of fonts leave the website with a less than polished appearance. While there is a logo, the quality is low (300x517 pixels) and upon
closer inspection the outline of that state of Illinois is jagged. It is also unclear as to what the symbols inside the outline are. This could use some updating. The logo does appear on each page however, which does support a consistent brand.

The IMHCA website has no accessible search bar for page viewers. This seems like an easy addition, as their website design is through a membership software. In this case the “join” button would be a membership link, because of the organization’s association status. Surprisingly, there is no membership link in the menu bar at the top of the page. The only way to get to the page with membership information is to click the “Become a Member” link which is in the bottom (before scrolling), right hand side of the homepage. Based upon the recommendation of the “F-Layout”, this placement is quite literally the last place the viewer would look.

Additionally, if one were to wait two full rotations (approximately 6 seconds each) of the banner ads on the homepage then they would also be prompted by another membership link. The problem is that, as stated in the “22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has”, the average website visitor only takes 50 milliseconds to form an opinion about a website. Capturing and retaining their attention on this page for twelve seconds for the carousel to come around to the membership ad is therefore an unlikely feat.

The call to action is clear. The first of the banner ads in the carousel is for the association’s upcoming annual conference. If membership is not their chosen call of action, then attendance at IMHCA’s largest upcoming event (which their Annual Conference is) should be their action call. However, the one problem with this, as was the concern with the same placement at their “Become a Member” link, is that it is not always on the screen. While this is the first item in the carousel, if the viewer is preoccupied with something else on the homepage then they may not even notice the banner until it has transitioned to the second item.
While the copywriting does create a sense of urgency when prompting registration for events, there is noticeably very little copy throughout the website in general. Most text on the website are sentence fragments or links to another external website with information on the desired topic.

IMHCA has a distinct homepage with their main call to action (attending their Annual Conference), links to their social media feeds, and other upcoming training events. Ironically, IMHCA has an entire “About us” section of their website with multiple pages, yet none of these pages say what IMHCA is. The only place to find that information is on the IMHCA homepage on the bottom left of the page. It would make the most sense to move that information to the “About us” page as many visitors of the website may not even scroll down that far on the homepage.

There is a membership page, yet there is no way to access it from the main menu. The only way to access it is from the banner or from the “Become a Member” link on the homepage. There is no donate page, but for an Association that isn’t unusual. Associations get their money from membership dues and donations would be infrequent, if at all. There are pages for both IMHCA’s Workshops and Annual Conference. As these are the only events that IMHCA hosts, they are comprehensive. Attendees may register online for any of these events and each event listing offers comprehensive information on the topic. There is no accessible news/blog area on the IMHCA website. The closest thing to a news/blog section is a running social media feed on the website. While there is no page labeled as a “Resource” page, IMHCA offers licensure and legislation pages, which are the two main areas of focus for the organization. There is a members only area that requires an email and password to access and their main “About us” page offers
sparse contact information. The “Staff” page provides specific contact information for individual staff members.

The IMHCA website is responsive and is organized by each column (left to right) on mobile. The banner ads and a number of the graphics are cut off or misaligned on mobile, however. IMHCA does add user information into communications. The website is integrated with their email software so when an individual provides their information on the website a profile is automatically created in their database as a prospect. IMHCA does not utilize website popups and does not perform A/B testing on their website to determine website or web tool effectiveness.

IMHCA is using a number of the top social media networks for non-profit organizations. They have active Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn profiles. IMHCA is posting to Facebook regularly, though not frequently (recently, once a week on average though this varies based on the month). Their posts always include a graphic and tend to cover the topics of upcoming association events, legislation updates, and general mental health content. The content that they post on Twitter is very similar to their Facebook content (which is unsurprising as the organization uses Buffer, a social media management platform, to post to their social media accounts). However, they do use Twitter to share content from other sources in addition to the aforementioned content that is also on Facebook. While IMHCA has a LinkedIn profile, they have created a personal profile (like an individual would have) instead of a business page. Additionally, they don’t post much content (two posts within the past year).

The Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association (IMHCA) was unique in terms tax forms. While the organization is publicly known as the Illinois Mental Health Counselors Association, the organization also has an academic branch called the Illinois Mental Health
Counselors Academy. The most recent year that both of these organizations had an IRS Form 990 available on GuideStar was 2015. Looking at both forms for this organization are quite illuminating, and not in the best way. According to both 990 filings from 2015, neither branch of the organization spent any money on advertising and promotion or printing, publications, postage, and shipping. However, they did spend $41,321 on other costs which includes workshop, conference, and office expenses. It is possible that various marketing tasks could have been absorbed by these expenses. Additionally, IMHCA spent $109,337 on salaries. Many of the marketing costs may have utilized free platforms (social media) but would have required employee time to complete. It is also interesting to note that much of IMHCA’s finances are itemized under the Academy, which has 501(c)(3) status. Conversely, the Association has 501(c)(6) status because it is a trade/professional organization. The way they have itemized their finances is not surprising because 501(c)(3) organizations reap significantly more impressive benefits than 501(c)(6) organizations when it comes to tax exemptions.

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DIECUTTING AND DIEMAKING
(http://www.iadd.org)

The International Association of Diecutting and Diemaking (IADD) is the leading resource for the diecutting, diemaking and converting industry. We work hard to help you succeed by giving you the tools and support you need. [Through your membership you can] develop beneficial and profitable relationships, connect with industry leaders and experts, increase your knowledge (and educate your staff), keep ahead of industry news and innovations, access in-depth technical information, and use cost-effective, exclusive benefits and much more!

The researcher worked for this non-profit as the Chapters, Meetings and Marketing Coordinator. Therefore, she has an intimate knowledge of and played an integral part in the development of all association marketing including website and social media. The researcher had no input on the IADD website design as it was not updated during her employment. Because this
organization is international (in comparison to the first two being county or statewide) there are data protection limitations that are specific to certain countries (and some U.S. states) that must be adhered to. A site map and screen grabs for IADD can be found below.
The IADD’s website was custom made for the organization. The IADD’s longtime IT staff member (part-time, contract) created and maintains the website for the organization. To the web visitor much of this website may seem antiquated or clunky, but to the staff this website serves many functions that a more current or standardized website would not. For instance, many of the tabs on the website do not populate a new page (and do not have direct, copy-able links) but do minimize spam programs’ ability to easily comb information from the website. This is a unique security measure, as neither of the other websites in this study use this security measure.

Although the IADD website is the most visually appealing of the three in this study at first glance, it also the most jam-packed with information and links. That being said, it follows the “F-Layout” and, even though there is a lot of information, still lends to a pleasant viewing experience. The information does appear to read most important top left to top right and then left to right on the next menu as well. The one design flaw here is that some of the information in the top menu is duplicative when looking at the subsequent banner menus on the page (there are four in total).
The web design is visually appealing. IADD keeps their website simple, yet professional looking, with the same shade of purple being used throughout. They also include a variety of photos that can be accessed throughout the website that include pictures of people at various IADD events. The photos used throughout the website are high resolution and the graphics are crisp. Nearly every page has some sort of image on it that is illustrative of what the page has information on.

The primary font used on the website is a simple, san-serif font: Geneva. There were some headers throughout the site that used the Verdana font, which was a noticeable difference. It wasn’t jarring or unpleasant, as both are simple fonts. The IADD logo is clear, crisp, and a high resolution. It is simple enough to analyze, as it is just the name of the organization and an outlined globe, but still visually interesting enough to not be boring.

The IADD website has no search function available to site visitors. This is troublesome as there is so much information on the website that it might take someone several minutes to find the information they are looking for.

The IADD homepage has a few links that lead to their “Membership” center. The most prominent of these is a large button on the bottom left of the page that has the text “Become a Member” on it. Additionally, membership information can be found under the “Benefits of Membership” tab in the header menu. There is no clear call to action. The upcoming events are not highlighted on the homepage and while the membership information is prominent, it isn’t standing out in any special way. The website is very static in this way, as IADD highlights upcoming events and promotions elsewhere, leaving the homepage of their website continually consistent. Although there is a lot of text on each page, the copy is written in active voice and is
presented in snippets, such as short paragraphs or bullet points. There is a lot of information, but the way it is presented is still easy to read.

The IADD homepage is simple and lacks a number of the things Wild Apricot recommended for a homepage (main call to action on this page, along with news, featured members, upcoming events, and lots of pictures), but it does provide links to all of these things. Instead of telling website visitors what information they want right away, the IADD provides them with any and all of the informational possible, just a click away. As mentioned previously, there is no search function on the IADD website, so having all of the information accessible from the homepage could be both useful and challenging.

There is no “About us” page on the IADD website. There is an entire section (with numerous tabs) titled “The IADD” with links to board members, officers, and staff. The one thing that is obviously lacking from this mix is an explanation of what the IADD is and does. Someone coming to the website to look for a mission statement or purpose would not be able to easily find what the IADD is about.

The “Membership Center” offers all of the information that one might want to know when considering IADD membership. There are testimonials, key points on why one should join, a breakdown of the membership levels, and a link to the printable membership application. Similar to the IMHCA analysis, there is no donate page, but for an Association that isn’t unusual. There are event pages for each type of event IADD hosts including “Chapter Event Calendar”, “IADD Annual Meeting”, “IADD Midyear Meeting”, “IADD Xchange Programs”, “Odyssey Expo”, and “IADD and Industry Calendar” pages. Each type of event appeals to a different audience, so it makes sense that they would be separated in this manner. Additionally, the events calendar they provide is a great visual supplement to the written event dates/information.
While not blatantly obvious, there is a link to the “President’s Column” under “The IADD” tab. This column is updated monthly with updates from the IADD President’s column in the organization’s magazine. As it is regularly updated and discusses issues relevant to members, this arguably falls under the blog category. IADD could expand on this, however, and provide varied blog-type content and/or a news section.

Again, IADD is not shy when it comes to providing information. They have both a “Resources” tab on their homepage and an entire Resource Center. This page provides access to Standards and Policy Documents, as well as an online glossary and a regional industry directory. There is a members-only area that requires a username and password to access. This username and password is emailed to members on a monthly basis. There is a “Contact Us” popup (as mentioned, IADD frequently uses popups instead of web pages for security purposes). A popup includes basic information about contacting the organization and has information specific to each staff member.

The IADD website is not responsive and looks the same on mobile as it does on desktop, just very tiny. IADD does not collect personal information via their website for communication as their email software makes it difficult to include personalized information in emails. IADD does make use of website popups occasionally, but only if they determine there is something worth highlighting from a marketing perspective, but they do not collect any information in these popups. IADD does not perform A/B testing on their website to determine website or web tool effectiveness.

IADD is using all of the top social media networks for non-profit organizations. They have active Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube profiles. IADD is posting to Facebook daily, sometimes multiple times a day. Their posts always include a graphic and tend to cover the
topics of upcoming events, thanking new and returning members, and technical content. The content that they post on Twitter is very similar to their Facebook content (Like IMHCA, IADD uses Hootsuite to post to their multiple social media accounts). However, they do use Twitter to share retweets about their upcoming industry Expo. IADD has both a LinkedIn page where they also post the content that they share to Facebook and Twitter, and a LinkedIn group where they share only technical content and have a platform for members of the industry to post questions and/or ask for insight. Their least used platform is YouTube. Most posts are from a year ago (or more) but it looks as though they may be revamping their use of YouTube as a platform, as they published new content just one week ago.

The International Association of Diecutting and Diemaking (IADD) was the most current when looking at available tax information of the three non-profits. They had a 2017 Form 990 on file. They had the highest net assets of the three associations observed, ending at $922,615 for the year. The IADD spent $2,797 on advertising and promotion in 2017. Additionally, they spent $20,871 on information technology, which does cover website maintenance. They also spent $294,227 on staff salaries which is again relevant because of staff time devoted to marketing efforts.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

This study was somewhat unique in scope and method, as the researcher was able to apply her own personal experience in each case examined in this study. While this was helpful when determining why specific decisions were made when analyzing design and content (as the researcher was oftentimes heavily involved in social media and website decisions or had been exposed to the institutional knowledge of how a process came to be it may have, understandably, impacted the researcher’s impartiality.

The different cases also did not occur completely concurrently, so while the researcher’s exposure to each non-profit is within a two-year period, it is possible that the time gap may have affected the selection of ever-changing technologies used by each organization. In addition, the researcher also played different roles in each organization (paid vs. unpaid) and this may have affected the researcher’s institutional knowledge and abilities.

Additionally, the researcher was not able to collect screen grabs from the time she actually worked at some of the organizations. Websites are ever-changing and while the researcher attempted to use some internet tools to retrieve the website from specific dates/times it was not possible for some webpages. The researcher also worked on many of these websites before embarking on her thesis. Therefore, she fully acknowledges that although she did have input on the design and text of all of the websites, there is still much to be critical of in terms of what could be improved. A self-critique the researcher can acknowledge in this area is that, though she did design one of the websites and had input in updating another, she did not apply all of the tools from “22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” while working on these websites as her work on the websites came prior to her research into these 22 features. Had she been able to use such a tool she believes the websites she did have input on would have been
higher quality. The fact that these websites also did not belong to the researcher impacted her ability to design the websites as she fully desired. This also impacted the final design of the websites.

In addition to the researcher’s limitations pertaining to the web design, there were also some general limitations pertaining to the web design tools and the “22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” assessment tool. Because two of the three websites were designed using template tools, the design element of the websites is innately limited. While template tools allow practically anyone to create and edit a website, they come with predetermined standards, such as the number of columns on a page or the location of the search bar. These template tools also limit which colors can be used on a page, often giving just dozens of options instead of the full color wheel.

While the “22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” was a very useful assessment tool, some of the features had subjective criteria, particularly the feature that included a friendly and welcoming design. Finding a design to be friendly and welcoming (even in terms of color scheme and visuals as Wild Apricot describes it) is very subjective. One visitor may find certain colors to be attractive and another may deeply dislike the colors chosen. Additionally, the non-profits in this study tended to gravitate toward certain colors, as two of the three had a purple based color scheme.

Lastly, the researcher would like to note that there are some criteria that the “22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” that are conditional and suggest they should be omitted as base criteria, particularly the donate and members only pages. These should be taken off the list and added as conditionals because they are almost always mutually exclusive. Most organizations that solicit donations do not have a membership and vice versa.
Looking at the sample of finances from all three organizations offers some insight, but also poses many questions. While two of the three organizations had clear, dedicated money for marketing, one of the organizations did not have any itemized dedicated money. However, due to the researcher’s involvement with IMHCA and simply looking at their website and social media, one could surmise that they have some costs associated with organizational marketing (not to mention event and meeting marketing as well).

Of the two organizations that had dedicated costs, the percentages of total expenses were vastly different. The Gracie Center spent nearly 56% of the reported year’s expenses on advertising and promotion, whereas the IADD spent less than 1% on advertising and promotion. Although these organizations are all non-profits, this difference in spending illustrates just one of the ways that their priorities and spending habits are completely different from one another. This could be because of the comparative ages and goals of each organization. The Gracie Center is a fairly new organization and getting the word out is a substantial challenge. Additionally, at the time of this study, The Gracie Center had no paid staff, so the higher percentage of money being spent on marketing makes sense as it is one of the more costly expenditures for a new organization. The IADD has already built that momentum and is well known as a resource within the industry, so they are able to focus their spending elsewhere. The fact that there is no easy way to determine the full amount spent on marketing based on the data in the report also makes it challenging to make substantive suggestions for or assessments of these non-profits based on finances alone.

One additional important point of comparison is the tax-exempt status and missions of these organizations. The Gracie Center is a 501(c)3 organization, whereas IADD and IMHCA are 501(c)6 organizations (although IMHCA does have a 501(c)3 partner organization). Funding
for the latter organizations primarily comes from members and events/trainings, whereas The Gracie Center must rely on donors and grants for funds. While each has a distinct mission and target audience, The Gracie Center has the additional challenge of limited funding and an audience that may have less access to the channels where they would learn about The Gracie Center. Marketing is a unique challenge for social service agencies like The Gracie Center, as opposed to trade associations but there is also a benefit. The Gracie Center does not have a clear pathway to supporters or participants like the other organizations, so they must cast a wider marketing net. However, sharing information with many audiences across many channels will allow The Gracie Center to reach more people that may become a sponsor or donor of the organization. Trade associations are very limited in receiving financial assistance from supporters outside of their target audience.

After looking at all of the factors examined in this study, this thesis provided the tools to answer the research questions that were presented in Chapter 2. Non-profits are indeed designing their websites and using social media based upon industry recommendations, generally. While all of the organizations that were analyzed were following a number of the standards, each one had room for significant improvement other areas. Based upon this research and the previous research discussed in the literature review, this appears to be the resounding case for non-profits: they are headed in the right direction.

Despite the efforts, non-profits are not using social media effectively. Though one of the organizations did have an account for each of the suggested channels, the frequency of use and types of content published were not the kinds of content that inspire action. Secondly, any non-profit that is looking for a cost-effective way to improve their online marketing presence can look to the different tools offered in this thesis to get a basic idea of what are mostly cost
effective things they can incorporate into their strategy right now. Non-profits with limited budgets should be looking at these tools, which are free, and at least spending some time using them to see if they are able to enhance their connection with their audience in a meaningful way. The one caveat here is that some of the 22 features may simply not apply to the type of work every non-profit does. Using these tools as a suggestion and not as strict instruction is also key.

Taking into account the different tools available to non-profits and their often limited financial means, the researcher has created this document which both updates the research into this area and provides a template for what any individual or organization with goals similar to a non-profit can use when crafting their online marketing presence. The research on non-profit website design and social media usage published prior to this paper is heavily concentrated around the early 2000’s, so this thesis serves as an update to that research.

Additionally, the researcher wanted any non-profit of similar scope to those in this study, or any individual or business with similar out-reach goals, to be able to reference this thesis as a guide to effective design. The conclusions and suggestions made as well as questions answered in this thesis could thus apply to any independent entity with an online presence that has any business growth purpose.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It is fascinating to see such vast differences between non-profits that would all be considered small and are all headquartered in suburban/rural Illinois. One thing that these non-profits do share though is that all of their digital marketing efforts certainly have room for growth and will need to continue to expand to not only stay relevant, but flourish. While these small non-profits are currently struggling in some areas when it comes to digital marketing, they are on the right track and have positioned themselves for success; they just need to focus more of their efforts toward targeted digital marketing and take it from something they are just using to developing it as a strategic tool based on industry suggested guidelines. The public, especially donors and volunteers, have become increasingly focused on the digital faces of organizations, so non-profits need to embrace and prioritize this as an essential component of achieving their missions. Non-profits need to think about how they can start using all of their channels effectively to connect with as many people as possible that could be in their audience. Each audience segment has a different purpose for a non-profit (donor, volunteer, member) and may need to be reached in a different way than other audience segments. For instance, someone in school may be interested in volunteering but may not have the money to donate to a non-profit. Meeting them on the platforms they use is going to make for a more effective connection and hopefully a positive end result for the non-profit organization. Additionally, people are so used to the clean and polished look that businesses are able to produce for their digital marketing efforts that non-profits must overcome the additional hurdle of limited funds and oftentimes limited staff to have a finished marketing project that is both attractive and informative. Non-profits can use free tools and templates, such as “The 22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” or the results of the HubSpot social media survey to help achieve this goal. Using these
tools gives the average non-profit marketing manager some key insight into some best practices for non-profit websites in general.

While this study was able to analyze a limited pool of non-profits in Illinois that are using digital marketing on a more local or specialized scale, it would be beneficial to be able to conduct an ethnographic case study of a larger, internationally known non-profit (such as the Red Cross or PETA) that seeks audience from many different types of groups and supporters. While some challenges may be the same, it is likely that they face different digital marketing challenges than those mentioned in this study. Additionally, the researcher selected “The 22 Features Every Top Non-profit Website Has” and the results of the HubSpot survey, but the researcher acknowledges there are many other quality assessment tools that could be applied as a framework to analyze websites and social media. From a more quantitative perspective, it would be interesting to look at data on how large non-profits use Search Engine Optimization and analytics differently than their for-profit counterparts. These would involve a deeper dive into non-profit marketing from a business and scientific perspective, whereas the researcher has chosen to focus on creative marketing for this study. Finally, while the researcher has discussed the value of social media, a deeper look at social media efficacy in relation to specific audience segments would help non-profits be able to take the guesswork out of targeting their outreach efforts.
REFERENCES


