



Requirements for the Ideal Gallery Website

Curating Works Using Today's Digital Marketing Tools & Techniques

In the information technology field, too many projects fail or fall short of expectations at the end of their development cycle. Websites are not an exception. Without a list of requirements for an effective site, many art galleries end up with sites that fall short despite substantial investment. Gallery owners can spend a lot on a site, but without making sure certain requirements are met, the site doesn't help the gallery's business. These requirements act as a checklist for stakeholders and directions for a web developer to provide what's needed in order to follow marketing best practices, maximizing the gallery's investment in the site.

Art galleries have marketing advantages other industries don't.

In today's marketing ecosystem, content is king, now more than ever before. Content competes for attention. Content drives search engine visits. Other industries struggle to find and license quality images and stories, resources needed to attract visitors for getting attention and engagement. The most qualified traffic, traffic that's looking for what you're offering, comes from search engines. Quality, audience engaging content, when published correctly, makes search engines to send more traffic to a site.

This document demonstrates how to leverage gallery content online.

The requirements in this document demonstrate how to leverage content with web marketing best practices, showcasing the content properly. Meeting these requirements makes sure content contributes positively towards search engine optimization for the site's important key terms. Meeting these requirements improves the user experience and the ease of curation of behalf of stakeholders. These requirements, when executed in a site design, maximize the investment by assuring the content draws visitors from Google and from social media, keeps them around, and converts them to sales.

These requirements are not necessarily a direct fit for all galleries; a gallery may only need a portion of them executed in their website. A gallery might also need additional requirements not listed here. This list is a good starting point for defining a specific set of requirements that are an exact fit for a gallery's ideal site. The key to making a website implementation succeed is clear communication.

Branding guidelines are not covered in this requirement document. They are, however a critical part of a site's success enhancing and driving business to a gallery. Things like color, fonts, layout, use of negative space, rules on messaging are totally unique from site to site, so we don't cover them here. Those elements are up to the stakeholders to define for web developers in addition to the requirements this document reveals. Telling web developers what your expectations are as completely as possible, and affirming preferences on a quantitative level helps a designer understand what you're looking for. For example, say to the developer who is designing your site things like "I like the menu font and behavior a lot from xyz.com but I don't like the background texture they used for it at all." The specificity stakeholders use has a direct impact on lowering the design and development effort, and therefore the costs and risks of the project as a whole.





Presentation

The way the site looks and feels to the end user must fulfill the following criteria.

- Site Architecture – Having a single page per work, at a minimum, is the most important site architecture feature. Works shouldn't just be displayed as images in a slideshow or gallery, but should instead have their own unique URLs, a minimum of one per work. This allows each work to be indexed on-site and in search engines uniquely. It also provides for individual works to be shared easily.
- Site Layout – The site should be designed to make a strong impression on the home page, showcasing the unique qualities of the gallery that set it apart from other galleries. The layout possible is usually determined by the options available in the Content Management System or Theme used in it. It's important to ensure the CMS and the theme chosen can achieve the desired layout.
- Organization – Works should be categorized according to the taxonomy, or classification system that's most important to the gallery. The website should be able to represent the different works, categorized appropriately and flexibly. At a minimum, works are understood as needing to be categorized by artist.
- Blog – A blog is simply a chronological list of articles. A blog should be included in the site to allow the affirmation of thought leadership, distinguishing this galleries collections, artists, works or philosophy.
- News & Past Events – A section that highlights the events that the gallery holds and events in other locations, particularly the pictures that result from the event, is needed to showcase attendance at previous events.
- Mobile Friendly Public Facing Site – More than half of the searches today are performed on mobile phones. Recent rule changes by Google cause sites that aren't mobile friendly to perform poorly in mobile searches. Being mobile friendly is also referred to as having a responsive design. Read more about the day Google changed the rules and what happened.
- Brand Representation – Your sites name, layout, colors, fonts and logo should all be consistent with your brand's image. Contradictory fonts, layouts, colors and logo treatments should be avoided. Requirements for a website should detail the exact choices for these options. If such fundamental design elements aren't discussed, tested, and affirmed before the buildout begins, the cost of including them afterwards could be prohibitive. Get it right up front and you won't have to pay for it twice.





Marketing

Stakeholders are the people who need the website to work. Stakeholders need to be able to curate works, edit the site, update events, and update content with ease, frequently. Without this ease of administration, the volume of marketing that needs to take place on the site in order to compete for traffic will be less than it should be.

- Artist Curation – New artists should be easy to add to the website. The artists bio information and images that represent the artist, over and above the works, for example a photo of the artist, need to be easy to add.
- Works Curation – Works should be easy to add to the site in a drag-and-drop manner. During the buildout of the site, many works should be able to be added at once, from a spreadsheet. After the site goes live, works should be able to be added by gallery curators without need for intervention by web developers quickly and easily, taking just a couple of minutes per work. Works should be categorized by artist and by other criteria or taxonomy important to the gallery.
- Web Based Image Modification – Scaling, cropping and other basic image manipulation functions should be possible through the backend administrative interface of the website. This should replace the need for
- Event Curation – Upcoming events should be displayed prominently and in a manner easy to navigate to. The event listing should display the time, place, contact person, RSVP details and what the event is about. Event listings should be mobile friendly and link with Google Maps so people on their way to the events can find the venue easily.
- Mobile Friendly Administration w/ Voice Recognition – The ability to update the pages in the site and add new sites should be able to be performed via mobile phone, either via app or mobile web interface. The text entry modes should support the native smartphone voice-to-text feature. The ability to upload photos and other resources like graphics and PDFs directly to the website's content management system is needed.
- Multi-user Curation – The backend administrative interface to the website must support multiple users with different levels of content publishing rights.
- Integration with Social – The website should integrate properly with the major social media sites, including but not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. This includes the ability for content to be shared from the site in a manner that showcases inbound links in a highly aesthetic manner. Open Graph Tagging and Twitter Card settings should be part of the site configuration so as to yield the best appearing posts (large image) in the social media publication the site URLs are shared to.
- Metrics Collection – Site visits and visitor behavior should be collected and displayed via the backend interface from 2 separate 3rd party analytics systems, for example: Google Analytics (required) and WordPress.com (or other 3rd party equivalent) .
- Social Share Buttons – Buttons that allow sharing of the per-page content in the site should be prominent, worked into the layout of the site in an aesthetic manner, and have options for display so that the option matching the look of the site can be chosen.
- Brand Building – The site must allow the gallery to visibly exemplify best practices, reinforce the gallery's style in terms of imagery, color, fonts chosen etc. The site must allow the curators to speak and express themselves freely, yet restrained by and in the tone of the brand without extra effort through the backend interface. Styles must be maintained independent of the message.
- Search Engine Optimization – The site should exemplify best practices in technical search engine optimization. Tools must be available for the backend interface that provide for per-page scoring relative to defined keywords, allowing on-page SEO to be performed by curators, once trained.





The layout and code of the site must be search engine friendly and facilitate expression of search engine factors being configured in the backend of the site.

- Newsletter List Integration – The site must allow email and optional contact info collection either directly or via integration with 3rd party, compatible vendors.
- Ad Campaign Facilitation – The site and layout chosen must allow for rapid deployment and testing of Landing Pages for use in ad campaigns. The site should allow collection of variables that markup individual ad insertions, so granular traceability of leads is possible on first click. This data should be easily extractable for comparison of inbound link effectiveness.





Technology

The site must be managed via modern, readily available, secure content management system software. Security best practices must be maintained in the publication, but it also must be possible for non-web developers, specifically the curating stakeholders of the gallery, to add and update content easily, quickly, and for the most part without the need for a web developer's effort on a day-to-day basis.

- Security – The site must have the ability to restrict non-administrators, non-curators, and non-stakeholders from accessing the backend interfaces where content is managed. The site should have some level of built in firewall that detects and blocks aggressive bots and hackers, once detected; limiting their ability to launch focused DDOS attacks against the site.
- 24/7/365 Access – The site is intended to be live 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for all days of the year. The server, network, server software, CMS software and site configuration should be monitored for intrusion and attacks.
- Futureproofing – The CMS, theme, layout, integration with social media and analytics systems should be able to respond rapidly to changes in user behavior, security updates, and changes to laws and requirements dictated by third parties. Changes to operating systems, databases, network configurations and those necessitated by unplanned events should have their impact on the site's availability minimized.
- Cost-of-ownership - The sites software and maintenance costs should be planned and evaluated before CMS, theme and layout should be chosen. Both the time required to curate and the time required from web developers, should new requirements arise, should be minimized.
- Availability of Future Development Talent – The availability for people to help with the website in the future, developers who are affordable, effective and accessible is critical. A proprietary 3rd party management system with few people familiar exempts a candidate CMS.
- Audit-Trail & Revision Retention – Authors of content must be recorded as well as those who update the content. An audit trail showing who, what and when updates were made or content is published is needed. The ability to retain previous versions of pages, from each update is needed should reverting the page back to a previous version is required on a per-page, per-update basis.
- RSS Feeds & XML Site Maps –The site should feature automatically created, public-readable RSS feeds from each taxonomy category of works, or a global RSS for all categorized site updates. This facilitates indexing, syndication and marketing automation. XML site maps should be maintained automatically for access by search engine crawlers.
- Friendly URLs – The web page addresses, or URLs, of the site should be easily typed and maintainable on a per-page basis to allow both automated (from the page title) and manual editing.





Sales

- On-site Buying – The site should facilitate either buying or the addition of buying features. If on-site buying is required by the stakeholders, there should be readily available add-on code in the marketplace that doesn't require engineering the buying features from scratch, and allows for easy roll-out of buying functionality without site downtime.
- Order & Customer Administration – In addition to the ability for visitors to order pieces from the site, the backend administrative interface should allow for basic, easy management of orders and customer information associated with orders.
- Integration w/ PayPal, Ebay, Amazon, Google & Authorize.net – The site, if e-commerce enabled, needs to allow payment either via affiliation with a 3rd party e-commerce site like Amazon, or allows payment directly via PayPal or Authorize.net

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