

Review/Evaluate Mosque Websites

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On the internet, visitors are inherently impatient. Unorganized and insufficient information further frustrate the viewers very easily. After an intensive study of the websites of 112 United States mosques, I found a number of basic flaws that could easily distract the visitors from receiving the core message of the mosque.

Grandiose website manuals with turgid writing styles often portray the construction of a quality website as very difficult business best left to the people with advanced IT expertise. The simple idea of a website looking good and working properly appears like an intimidating challenge. In order to simplify the strife of setting up a mosque website, a detailed checklist has been developed that will enhance any mosque website.

Finding the site:

1. Is the URL logical (mosquename.org)?
2. Does it have a logical mosque name without dashes or other special symbols? Many mosques choose their URL name with dashes, underscores, special symbols, hard to spell words, long phrases and other characteristics which make it difficult for users to find the mosque or to remember the website address.
3. Is the website listed high in the search engines while searching with keywords that a visitor might use such as “Detroit mosque” or “Islamic Center at Herndon, VA” etc?
4. Are there several links to the site provided by the major search engines and local Islamic organizations?

Home Page

1. Does the home page have the mosque name and address displayed prominently?
2. Is the home page welcoming, interesting and inviting to visitors?
3. Does the banner image intensify the welcome message? (banner image should NOT be too big, too small, flashy or irrelevant i.e. contains mosque picture of different country instead of the actual mosque and the local community pictures)
4. Does the home page contain attractive tabs with catchy phrases like “Get Involved,” “Log in for God” and so forth? Such tabs are more effective than the traditional tabs like “Home”, “About Us”, “Service”, “Program”, and “Contact Us”.
5. Does the home page publish and archive the press releases for the community?

About Us

1. Does the site contain the history of the mosque for the younger generation and new comers?
2. Does the site have a list of the committee members and their brief information to increase their acquaintance and reduce the distance between the leadership and community?
3. Does the site have the Imam/s information and credential details to foster the community consent regarding their spiritual leadership?
4. Is the annual report of the mosque published to enhance the transparency?
5. Are there mission and vision statements published to share and reflect the possible future direction?

6. Is there an official constitution of the organization posted to clarify the mosque's policies?

Contact Us

1. Is there any common/general contact information available for curious visitors?
2. Does the site have contact information for key leaders of different departments and programs for specific requesters/parties?
3. Is there a dynamic map with location/s for the main center and its branches for visitors' convenience? A written driving instruction can be very helpful too.
4. Is there a link (or a section describing) for email distribution listing to be a part of the congregation and to receive periodic updates?
5. Is there any 3D tour of the physical building of the center for a real-time look and feel?

Program

1. Does the site have a separate section for the followings constituencies so that no one will feel left out:
 - a. Content for youth?
 - b. Content for young brothers?
 - c. Content for young sisters?
 - d. Content for men?
 - e. Content for women?
 - f. Content for interfaith interactions or involvements?

Education

1. Is there a link for local Islamic Schools within/nearby the mosque facility to reinforce the need for formal faith education?
2. Is there a list of traditional Islamic classes to spread the religious lessons among lay participants?
3. Are there list of other education programs and/or guest speaker sessions to stop diminish institution isolation?

Service

1. Is the daily prayer service schedule easy to locate and view without any additional download of pdf or going deeper into the site? Providing prayer arrangement is the main purpose of any mosque; so this information has to be instantly available without unnecessary obstacle.
2. Is there any description of special prayer services (Friday Prayers, Tarawee prayers, Eid prayers etc.)? These are the best opportunities to draw in visitors as praying in the congregation is obligatory for such prayers.
3. Does the site describe the mosque's membership benefits to encourage new visitors?
4. Does the site document the process of becoming a member for interested visitors?
5. Are there any social outreach services available to get actively engaged with the community?
6. Does the site offer information about the following social services?
 - a. Wedding Service
 - b. Funeral Service

- c. Family counseling
 - d. Community Service
 - e. Sports for Kids/Youths/Adults/Sister
7. Is there any programs listed that are held in collaboration with or coordinated by other Muslim organizations/Masjid locally to foster a faith-based friendship among the religious entities?
 8. Is there any information for non-Muslim visitors such as what Islam is, an invitation to visit and the etiquette when visiting the mosque to help them feel welcome?
 9. Does the site have a page for new Muslims or recent converts to embrace the essential rituals and culture?
 10. Does the site post regular lectures or *Halaqa* information for those interested in education?
 11. Are there any other extra curriculum services available within the congregation to enhance the options for participation?

Design:

1. Does the home page load quickly?
2. Is there a mobile version available for the site given the growing trend of smart phone users?
3. Does the site offer updated event calendar cataloging the past and the future events?
4. Does the site have a *Dua/Hadith* of the day to encourage the congregants to visit the website daily?
5. Are there links to the mosque's social media sites to enhance the feeling of connectedness within the community?
6. Does the site provide intuitive and easy navigation?

Technical Items

1. Are there any broken links that may sway the visitors away?
2. Are there any quick links to reach webmaster in case of technical difficulties?
3. Does the site provide web admin group's contact information to share any concerns about the website?
4. Does the site provide a means to report errors, ask questions or provide feedback?
5. Is there any indication of when the site was last updated?
6. Is there any "page under construction" that may annoy a visitor?
7. Does the site stream the Friday sermon (*kuthba*) live for congregants unable to attend?
8. Does the site have any other technical flaws in its navigation?
9. On long sections of text, are there "up" buttons to ensure convenient user navigation?

If the site offer an Interactive Portion (Member login)

1. Is the registration or sign up process quick and easy to entice all the visitors?
2. Is there an easy password retrieval process for returning visitors?
3. Does the interactive portion have online donation tracking to offer an easy acknowledgement of members' contribution?
4. Does the site offer other services for members like classified posting to increase their regular participation?

Others Contents

1. About Islam: Assume that Non Muslims will be viewing the website. While basic information about the faith is not a necessity, but may be important if community education is part of the mosque vision. It is also very effective in case the mosque is prominent or the only mosque within the area. This might include major Islamic organizational sites or sites with additional information about Islam.
2. Is there a search feature on the website to locate and retrieve information easily?
3. Does the website have copyright information?

Overall

1. Does the overall site comply with the mosque Mission/Vision/Goals?
2. Are the font size and the font colors easy to read and understand without straining on our eyes or mind?
3. Are there spelling and grammar errors to impair the conveyed information or diminish the overall web impression?
4. Does the site ensure flawless native English presentation with appropriate grammar? In addition, it may include translation into other languages?
5. Is there a proper balance between the graphics and the texts among the pages?

This is a comprehensive list, which may seem excessive for a new mosque. Especially when compiling everything beforehand, the task could often seem overwhelming. But that should not hinder our endeavor to establishing an effective mosque website. Rather every mosque needs to consider their contextual dynamics to determine feasible list of the site needs to ground the initial cyber presence possible. Overtime the site content will grow gradually and become a mature one. In order to deepen and broaden the understanding of the mosque *dawah*, a continuous strife for competently crafted cyber presence is compulsory. In this day and age, no mosque in the United States is a physical mosque; every mosque has a virtual presence. We need to make sure that the web presence is done to bring the glory to God.