

Essential Website Elements for Garden Communicators



One good thing that we've learned from the lockdowns of 2020 and beyond is that we can become proficient with tech. We've taken online cooking courses and mastered Zoom happy hours. We

may even have binge-watched all of Netflix. Some of us have pivoted our onsite garden design consultations to virtual ones or offered evening talks to garden clubs across the country.

Let's make sure our websites are updated to highlight our new skills. Here are the trends I see developing, with my top tips for what to implement.

ESTABLISH A DIGITAL BUSINESS CARD

At the very least, you need your own website. A single page with your basic contact information is sufficient, and a photograph of you will instill confidence. If you spend all of your time on a particular social media platform talking about your work, your services, your books, remember that it could be shut down with a single tweet. The only way your own digital slice of the Internet goes away is if you don't pay the bill.

For writers, consider creating a media kit. GardenComm member and former president **Debra Prinzing** did this beautifully when she launched her *Slow Flowers Journal* last summer. She has a web page dedicated to telling readers and reviewers what's in the book. One brilliant feature Debra included was a 10-minute video describing her journey about writing the book and some behind-the-scenes of the book being printed. She was able to create this with an iPad and the guidance from Amy Stewart's Skillshare Class called *Create Your Own Book Video: A Step-by-Step Guide for Authors*.

PROVIDE A GUIDED JOURNEY

With the fire hose of information available on the Internet today, it is our job to be the knowledgeable guide. GardenComm member **Mary-Kate Mackey** gave a great workshop at the Salt Lake City conference about applying the Hero's Journey to our writing. We can



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Implement these strategies and tips to strengthen your brand and create a marketplace presence.

also use this concept to help organize the elements on our website. It is worth the time to get to understand your ideal reader, which problems they need solved, and which questions they will have as they continue on their journey.

- **Make sure your website starts with a heroic image.** Show readers what is possible. Whether it's a stack of books you wrote, or a sumptuous organic garden, give your readers the inspiration to start. If you can do it, so can they.
- **Acknowledge their problems.** On your home page, feature three blog posts that address what you have struggled with, and reassure readers that you were able to overcome that writer's block or your previous black thumb. When you can demonstrate that you have overcome their same problems, they are more likely to read every word on your blog, follow every social media post and rave about your next book.
- **Offer a solution.** Generously give your readers advice on how to get started on solving their problems. Make sure you're not overwhelming them with all of the

details. Show them how they can have a quick win. Offer photography or writing prompts or provide advice on growing microgreens. We learn best by doing and often the biggest problem our readers have is actually getting started. Give them an early success.

- **Be there.** Let your readers know how they can get more help when they are ready. GardenComm member **Noelle Johnson** acknowledges that growing in Arizona is entirely different than in the rest of the country. She offers a membership subscription that builds on her free content. Once a new gardener has an easy win with her suggestions for fuss-free flowers for the desert garden, they can sign up to learn more. Make sure there's a simple call to action on your website where they can get on your email list, take your course, or buy your newest book.

OFFER SOMETHING FOR FREE

Email is one of the simplest digital marketing tools available, and despite the distractions

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of FaceChat and Pinstagram, its effectiveness has persisted. I would rather have a newsletter in my pocket to read quietly on my own schedule, than to be bombarded with all the pings and notifications of the Internet.

To find your audience, offer something valuable. It is worth the time to create a simple PDF to package your ideas and give your readers that quick win. Some options you can offer are:

- Topic prompts or calendars to encourage new writers to start
- A list of essential tools of your trade (either digital or physical)
- Recorded audiobook samples
- Checklists or how-to guides for getting started on their own masterpieces

SHOW, NOT TELL

Make sure your website (and social media) have good visuals. At very minimum, include a photograph of yourself because people buy from people.

When Debra mentioned including personality shots in her media kit, she meant a photograph of you in your environment—the writer at her desk or gardener in the field—not just a stagnant headshot. If you offer garden coaching, make sure there's a photo of you with a client actually in the garden.

Consider setting up a small windowsill studio or corner of your bedroom with good

light, so that you can stage the tools of your trade. A writer can always showcase a laptop, your favorite notebook or the coffee that fuels you. We're lucky as gardeners always to have interesting tools and flowers to photograph. If you have that studio ready to go, you can grab a quick snapshot of your tomato harvest without the hassle of getting everything set up and hiding the clutter each time.

Our readers crave authenticity. With the easy availability of the cameras in our pockets, take the time to craft a good image to complement what you're writing.

TELL, NOT SHOW

My final piece of advice is to make sure your web content is properly annotated and also mobile-accessible. Google is getting smarter daily and is looking for digital clues to make sure your content answers the questions being asked.

Start with your topic and determine what other keywords are suggested. Related and long-tail keywords used as subtitles will help your content get discovered. Ensure you complete the Alt-tag information for each image to carefully describe the image for screen readers.

If you produce video content, make sure you include detailed descriptions so that a viewer knows that at timestamp 2:22, you will start talking about the two drip-irrigation emitters you need for your setup this year.

Take the time to implement a captioning system. YouTube is getting even better at

Debra Also Recommends:

- A personality shot or three
- An author bio
- Contact information
- A sell-sheet for retailers
- Photos of the book cover / page layouts
- The book jacket copy
- A book excerpt or author reading
- A video explaining your journey and book preview
- Some FAQs or interview question prompts and answers
- Testimonials or pre-publication reviews
- A link to where to get your book

automatically adding text to your videos, or hire a teen to install a captioning app and transcribe it for you.

It's time to ignore that relentless pace of creating social media content and return to your roots. Customers are spending more time online, craving authentic engagement and instructions for what to do with their newfound time. Build your solid foundation so that when your audience needs to learn more, you'll be there with the answers they seek. Become their personal hero. 🌸

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