

Content Strategy: Historic Manassas

VisitManassas.org

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this website is to promote events, tourism, small businesses and revitalization in the historic downtown area of Manassas, Virginia to residents of the cities of Manassas and Manassas Park, Prince William County, the extended Northern Virginia region and tourists to the region.

Audience Profile

- **AGE:** The audience's age ranges from age 28 to senior citizens. This age range is based on the types of activities, events and businesses promoted by the organization, as well as the demographics of the suburban bedroom communities of the City of Manassas, City of Manassas Park and Prince William County.
- **EXPERTISE:** According to data from Prince William County and the United States Census Bureau, the population of Manassas, Manassas Park and Prince William County grew by 800% between 1960 and today (Prince William County Government, n.d.) (Quick Facts: Prince William County, Virginia, 2017). A majority of residents are first generation, without family roots in the area. A significant number are considered transient, living in the area for 1-5 years while stationed in the military or in other federal government positions. Expertise levels and engagement with the city and its destinations will vary from high to low.
- **EDUCATION:** The website and information presented are suitable for anyone with the ability to read English and browse standard internet websites.
- **CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE:** The cultural perspectives of the audience are ethnically diverse, but their lifestyles are common. The ethnic makeup of Manassas, Manassas Park and Prince William County is 42% white, 19% black, 22% Hispanic, 7% Asian and 10% other (Quick Facts: Prince William County, Virginia, 2017). Among all ethnicities, the audience is busy, employed and have longer than average commutes. The audience contains families with children, single adults, adult couples without children, empty-nest adults, and retirees.
- **ATTITUDES:** Visitors to the site have, or are seeking favorable attitudes about the City of Manassas, as they look for information on events and destinations.

- **EXPECTATIONS:** Visitors expect up to date and accurate information on events and destinations, as well as other information such as parking and how to plan and promote events with the organization.
- **CONTEXT:** Visitors will access the website on computers and mobile devices, through direct link and social media posts.

Frequency of Content Update

Content and news should be updated as soon as confirmed and approved, with a priority on events. Older events should be archived or removed to reduce clutter and confusion.

The business directory should be updated when there are changes, such as the opening of a new business or the closure of an existing business.

Competition

There are currently no publications competing with this organization.

Style

Positive Aspects



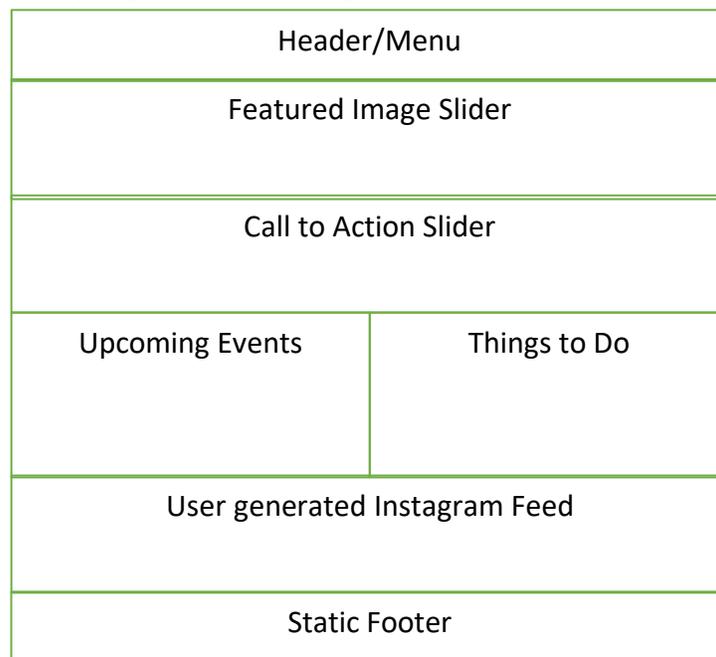
Figure 1: Home page image slider (visitmanassas.org)

The overall style of the website is clean and vibrant. The featured image slider (figure 1) corresponds with several upcoming major events, and the dining, shopping and farmer’s market sections of the site and finally a call to action to become a sponsoring member of the organization. Each image links to its respective page for more information. This gives visitors quick summary of the main items that the organization wishes to promote.

The mid-page call to action area offers quick access to visitors who may be in a rush. Similarly, the next five upcoming events displayed on the home page allows hurried users to quickly see if there are any interesting events in the next few days.

The user generated Instagram feed helps feed community engagement and pride.

The style of the home page follows a logical flow:



Style Negatives and Proposed Improvements

There is too much white space in the header. I recommend reducing its size or adding more elements, such as social media buttons. I also recommend that the header shrink as the user scrolls down. It currently takes up too much space at the top of the page, distracting the user experience of the rest of the page.

The call to action slider should be changed to a grid of the pictures. If site visitors scrolled down past the featured image slider, it is because they are seeking quicker access to information. Presenting another slider does not provide this information as quickly as they want.

I recommend a grid item for these six items: Shop, Dine, Attractions, Arts, Events, Farmer's Market.

The two-column section with Upcoming Events on the left and Things to Do on the right is confusing, as these terms are very similar. I recommend removing the Things to Do section, as it is redundant, and instead use this section to show the latest blog posts.

Content Improvement Proposal

The most important aspects of content and information on this website are accuracy, remaining up to date and ease of locating relevant information.

Events

The audience needs up to date information, especially when it comes to events. One challenge is keeping the information up to date. The site utilizes a plugin called Fusion Events to stay up to date. This is integrated on the events page as well as the home page. Given this tool, the staff should post events as soon as confirmed and approved.

Destinations

The audience also needs up to date and easy-to-locate information on destinations, restaurants and shopping. While the destination categories (dining, shopping, attractions, arts, services) have their own pages, each landing page for the respective categories only displays seven items. The visitors must then click a link to go to the next page for seven more items. As several of these categories have 20 or more items, visitors must go to three or more pages to see all the items.

For the ease of accessing information, and to maintain fairness in the business listings, I recommend displaying all items on one page for each category.

Blog

The website currently does not have a blog or a news section. I recommend adding a blog to the site where staff can post announcements, news and other updates. Blog posts improve search engine optimization, and can be shared on Facebook and Twitter.

Frequently Asked Questions

I recommend including a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section. Here, the organization can address questions regarding their specific roles, partnerships, how to submit an event and other questions that arise.

Header Menu

Several elements of the header menu and submenus are confusing or redundant.

I recommend restructuring the header menu as follows:

About	Visit Manassas	Destinations	Events	Get Involved
About Historic Manassas	Plan Your Visit	Shop	All Events	Donate
Latest News	Getting Here	Dine	Submit an Event	Sponsor
Board of Directors & Staff	Getting Around	Attractions	Event Vendor Information	Volunteer
Contacts	Lodging	Arts		Join a Committee
FAQ	Visitor Center	Services		
	Brochures	Historic Manassas Gift Card		

Social Media Improvement

Social media is an important part of engagement for an organization that promotes and sponsors events. Therefore, it is important to leverage the existing social media presence.

Each social media platform is different in its formatting of posts. While Instagram posts can be easily shared on Facebook in the same post, Instagram posts should not be shared on Twitter. Similarly, Facebook posts should not be shared on Twitter.

Facebook

Facebook events should be updated and shared as soon as a new event is added to the website. This allows attendees to RSVP, share the event with their network and post comments and questions. Questions should be answered as best as possible.

New blog posts should also be shared on the organization's Facebook page.

Twitter

Twitter should be used to share links to website event pages and blog posts, as well as event reminders and other short announcements.

Instagram

The organization should continue to post media and engage with users on Instagram. They should post event graphics, relevant pictures and pictures

during events, and using and encouraging the use of local hashtags. The hashtag #VisitManassas automatically displays photos on the website.

Bringing it all Together

Building on the existing style, this website needs a few major improvements.

- Reducing white space and shrinking the header when scrolling will improve the look of the site and allow more space for viewing information.
- Changing the call to action slider to a grid will increase access to important information.
- Adding a blog will improve user engagement and SEO.
- Replacing the “Things to Do” section with recent blog posts will reduce confusion and give easier access to the latest news and announcements.
- Ensuring all category pages have their items on one page will increase engagement with the businesses and activities listed, and save the user time.
- Adding and continuing to build a FAQ page will give the users quick information.
- Improving the header menu will reduce confusion and redundancy and allow for easier user navigation.
- Improving social media engagement by using best practices for each platform will increase user engagement and promotional activity.

References

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