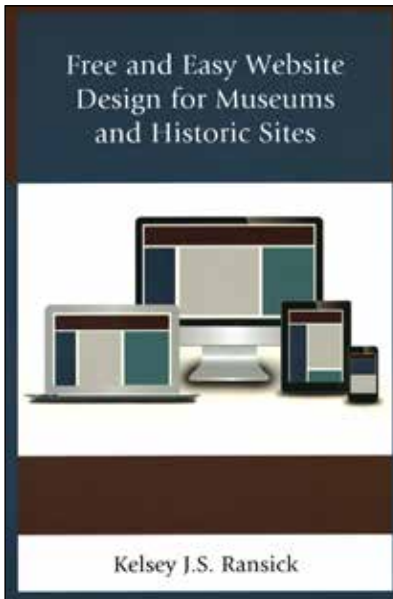# Free and Easy Website Design for Small Museums and Historic Sites by Kelsey J.S. Ransick

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With the growing dependency on technology to update us on nearby events and programs, smaller organizations and historic sites are experiencing the pressure to incorporate new technologies at an increasing rate. Historical societies have the opportunity to help residents of their communities feel that sense of place and connection, but oftentimes struggle to reach larger audiences. While many immediately think of social media as the answer, Kelsey J.S. Ransick argues that having a well maintained website will actually boost the organization's visibility and exude a level of professionalism and credibility. In her book *Free and Easy Website Design for Small Museums and Historic Sites*, part of the 2016 American Association for State and Local History book list, Ransick provides a priceless and essential resource for historic institutions who are either desiring to launch a first website or looking to revamp its current one.

Ransick provides a detailed and extremely easy to follow guide for working with free websites such as Wix, Weebly, WordPress, and Google Sites. She begins, however, with an introduction addressing some of the common myths about setting up and managing a website. One such myth she debunks is that websites are costly and organizations do not have the time or the money to administer it. However, she points out that more times than not, websites are the first points where visitors gather information about the organization and the historic site. Websites also reach greater audiences in a smartphone, technology-oriented culture that is accustomed to having the information readily at its fingertips. Ransick further disproves other myths in this section ranging from: does someone on staff need to know HTML, to specific fonts to use. Ultimately she sets the stage for her 3-Part breakdown that follows by stressing the point that consistency is key when developing a website.

Part One explores the necessary elements needed when preparing the content and layout of the website. Throughout this section, Ransick advises the need to do the legwork before actually inputting and designing the website. For instance, the organization needs a consensus and have agreement on what content or information will be on the site, the target audience, identification of goals, and related sub-pages. She then breaks down different points to consider when actually designing the site from choosing the right font to selecting the color-scheme. Additionally, she explains the importance of layout, use of images and multimedia, and taking advantage of Search Engine Optimization.

After explaining the key elements users expect, Ransick argues the next phase is crafting the website. It is in this section that she compares the host site: Wix, Weebly, WordPress, and Google Sites after which she devotes a chapter to each site. These chapters give step-by-step directions for setting up a website on any of the host sties, as well as Ransick's tips and tricks for using each one. Ransick structures it in a way that if the organization has already begun using or decided on one of the particular sites examined, all that is needed is to reference the corresponding chapter-the information for each site is contained within a singular chapter for each. She then explores writing or altering the code of the website to incorporate individual features specific to the organization's requirements. Altering the HTML is somewhat complicated, and while Ransick attempts to make it as easy to understand as possible, this section may confuse some. However, the guides provide much needed advice for working with the aforementioned website hosts.

The final part provides important information and advice for showcasing an institution's collections. This can be done using different sites, but the author focuses attention on three: Omeka, a photo-sharing site like Flickr or Photobucket, or using a blog. The section is broken down in a more succinct and less intensive walk through on how to administer and utilize those sites than was done when highlighting the ins-and-outs of the host sites in the previous section. Throughout, Ransick seeks to provide the simplest, yet comprehensive guide to designing a website for an historical institution.

The creation and administration of a website can be a daunting task to undertake for small museums with little staff or solely volunteer run. However, regardless of how sophisticated the site is, or what platform the organization chooses to use, *Free and Easy Website Design for Small Museums and Historic Sites* is a great resource for organizations regardless of their size. Ransick takes her experience creating a variety of websites and synthesizes it in a way that anyone regardless of whether or not the organization has someone on staff, or volunteers, who is a skilled graphic and computer designer can easily understand. The point she stresses is that historic institutions are tasked with connecting its community to the past through stories and that any move to showcase those stories (in this case through a web presence), is just one step forward. Ransick ends by saying that "Like the city itself, Rome's website was not built in a day."

Ransick, Kelsey J.S. Free and Easy Website Design for Small Museums and Historic Sites. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016.