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**ROCKVILLE AREA
VILLAGE EXCHANGE INC.**

DIGITAL STRATEGY GUIDE MONTGOMERY COUNTY VILLAGES

WWW.RAVEROCKVILLE.ORG

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ROCKVILLE AREA VILLAGE EXCHANGE INC.

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GOAL OF THE GUIDE

This guide has been created to serve as a resource for villages in the Montgomery County Area to aid in the set up (or redevelopment) of their digital presence. It contains a survey to help villages assess their level of need and commitment along with an in-depth analysis of the major areas of consideration when establishing a digital presence.

AREAS COVERED

1. Getting started
2. Brand identity
3. Digital strategy
4. Website development
5. Membership
6. Events and services
7. Social media
8. Communication
9. Maintenance

GETTING STARTED & SURVEY

Whether it is a new village or a village looking to revamp its existing digital presence, it is important to analyze:

- The goal(s) of the village - what is the village looking to do? What services will the village provide?
- What is important to the village in terms of creating a digital presence?
- Does the village have an existing tech strategy of any sort (g-suite, Microsoft office, website, etc)?
- What are the preferred communication channels (i.e email mail, etc) for the village? For members? To the public?
- Will the village solicit membership? And if so how? With any frequency? And will there be any associated fee(s)?
- Does the village collect donations? And if so, how?
- Are there events that the village is looking to host? If so, will people have to RSVP? Fee?
- Will the village offer services? If so, how will people sign up for these?
- How does the village want to communicate about events and services?
- Does the village have any branding, colors, or logos?
- What is the village's current resource allotment (does the village have a leadership team, a budget and/or strategic plan)? Will a current village member be able to maintain the village's digital presence on a routine basis?

To help answer these questions a survey has been developed to determine the best option for each village. The options scale in terms of commitment of resources needed.

[SURVEY: Used by Rave to determine what are the needs of the villages requesting technology support. Request a copy at \[support@raverockville.org\]\(mailto:support@raverockville.org\)](#)



BASIC TECHNOLOGY INFORMATION FOR ALL VILLAGES

BRAND IDENTITY

Goal: To create a cohesive and identifiable presence for the village to bring brand awareness to the existence of the village, and the various offerings.

What is a brand identity? A collection of elements that a company creates to portray their image to a customer.

Elements of a brand identity

- Logo
- Tagline
- Color palette
- Typography
- Imagery
- Visual rules/layout

[Resource that breaks down the elements of a brand identity](#)

Logo

A logo is the central element of a brand identity, the image that defines who the village is. A logo can be simple or very complex. For villages a simple image of houses, gathering places, people holding hands, etc. would likely be best.

Logos can be created for free in a variety of places online or with the assistance of a graphic designer.

Top free logo generators:

- [Canva](#)
- [Looka](#)
- [Wix](#)

Top free or low cost freelance graphic designers can be found on:

- [Fiverr](#)
- [Upwork](#)

Additionally, several website hosting companies (Wix, etc) also offer free logo creation upon purchasing a site and/or domain name.

Tagline

A tagline is a series of words or a short phrase that further adds brand awareness to the village. It is often displayed along with the logo but can be used separately as well. A tagline should be short, punchy, and easy to remember.

Some village tagline examples:

- KFNV - *Neighbors Helping Neighbors*
- Villages at Kentlands and Lakelands - *Promoting Social Connectedness - Providing Support*
- Bradley Hills Villages - *Growing and Nurturing a Caring Community*



Color Palette

A brand's color palette should align with the logo and tagline - what colors emote who the village is, and how the village wants to be known to their members and the wider public. Oftentimes a color palette is chosen when making a logo and tagline.

When choosing a color palette make sure to save it in a place that is easy to find, it'll be used across the village's entire digital strategy.

For online use, a HTML/web safe (Hex) color scheme is needed. Each color is represented as a # and then followed by a series of letters and/or numbers, for example white is #FFFFFF. Here is an easy to follow [HTML color code](#).

RGB color codes can be used as well and are listed in the above color code resource.

Not sure what the color palette is? Just google "what color is in this logo?" and use one of the various free color matching programs that appear. A logo typically just needs to be uploaded and then a color analysis appears in a matter of seconds.

Few examples of sites that can help with this:

- [Ginifab](#)
- [Image Color Picker](#)
- [HTML Color Codes](#)

Typography

Like color, typography helps define the brand. A unique typeface can make a village go from ordinary to extraordinary. Typography is just the typefaces that will be used throughout the village's brand identity, and often only consists of 1, 2 or 3 typefaces.

Again, typography will likely be defined when making the logo and/or tagline.

Imagery

Beyond a logo, a village can create a series of images or icons that further define who they are. For example, the infamous *Nike* swoosh is now considered a standalone logo, but in the early days was more a part of the larger imagery used by *Nike* to define who they were.

Villages likely won't have too many pieces of imagery beyond their logo or tagline, but if so, make sure that the images fall in line with the overall brand identity.

Visual Rules/Layout

Once the above brand elements are defined and created, how they appear on a website, social media and in an email are equally as important. The village will need to determine all of these elements before building, for example should the website be all on one page or tabbed out? More on this in the *Website Development* section, and specifically wireframing below.



Villages may already have an existing brand identity, which means this step can be skipped. If looking to update or re-design the village's existing brand the above elements should be considered.

DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Goal: To define how the village wants to be represented digitally, and via which communication methods.

What is a digital marketing strategy? A digital marketing strategy consists of the tools and tactics that will be used by a village to create brand awareness, elicit membership and facilitate communication between members (and the general public).

A digital marketing strategy consists of:

- Website
- Social media
- Communication
 - One to one communication
 - Mass communication (broad emails, blog, and newsletter)
 - Membership communication
 - Event and services communication

In a broader sense there are several other marketing channels and tactics (SEO, paid search/SEM, press releases, and more) that can be used, but this is a starter list and what will most likely be used by most villages.

A digital marketing strategy should be created and decided upon by the village upon creation. At the start fewer tactics and channels can be used, and then built upon as the village grows.

Internal requirements

As the village starts to determine its digital marketing strategy, they also need to make sure that there are established internal systems set up as well so the village can work together.

Suggested internal systems:

- **Centralized operating suite**
 - [Google workspace \(G-Suite\)](#) - far and away the easiest to use, most functionality, and very low cost
 - [Microsoft 365](#) - longevity of success, but more complicated to use and harder setup outside of a traditional office environment, also more expensive for add-ons
- **Video conferencing**
 - [Google hangouts](#) - free, comes with G-suite but less functionality
 - [Zoom](#) - industry standard, but there is a cost
- **Document sharing/storage**
 - [G-drive](#) - comes with G-suite
 - [Dropbox](#) - good alternative, but requires a separate login
- **Surveys**
 - [Google forms](#) - comes with G-suite, but not as many bells and whistles
 - [Survey monkey](#) - industry standard and very high functionality, but pricey even with nonprofit status
 - [Typeform](#) - good, cheap, reliable, simple alternative



- **Payment provider**
 - [Paypal](#) - good for international and widely used in the US
 - [Venmo](#) - US bank accounts only
 - [Stripe](#) - international standard, used by very large organizations, so higher fees (likely wouldn't suggest unless it's a very large village processing a lot of payments)
 - [Zelle](#) - pay and receive money directly from bank to bank

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT

Short-Term Goal: To create a baseline website for the village to begin to establish its digital presence.

Long-Term Goal: To have a website that can be used as a marketing tool for the village.

The bedrock of any digital marketing strategy is the website. A website should be used to inform the audience about:

- Who the village is
- Why the village was created
- The goals of the village (short-term and long-term)
- Services the village is looking to provide
- Events the village will host (if hosting events)
- How to sign up to be a member of the village (and any associated dues)
- How to donate to the village
- How to contact the village
- How to find the village on social media (if on social media)
- How to subscribe to the village's newsletter (if creating a newsletter)

First steps

To create and launch a website a village must have:

- A domain, along with an SSL certificate is HIGHLY recommended and generally purchased at the same time. (This is important because if the domain does not have an SSL certificate an HTTP will not appear, and as such it will signal to the user that the site is unprotected and should not be trusted).
- A website hosting provider
- Layout
- Content

Domain name

A domain name is the website that visitors will type in when searching for a village. A domain (and accompanying SSL certificate) can be purchased separate from the website hosting provider or together. Some villages may already have both, one of each or just one element. In general, it doesn't matter as domain names can be transferred to various website providers easily.

Common domain name providers:

- [GoDaddy](#)
- [Network Solutions](#)
- [Bluehost](#)
- [Domain.com](#)



Domain names on average will cost between \$5-\$30 per year, and then the accompanying SSL certificate will be an additional \$15-30 per year. Costs do vary depending on if the village uses .com, .org, .io, etc, and the more popular the name the more expensive it is. Generally .ORG domains are purchased for nonprofit organizations.

Additionally, not all domains will be available, so variations may be needed. The domain provider will often give suggestions on close available domains. Do not purchase an existing taken domain from a company, that is often extremely costly and hard to transfer.

To see if a domain is already taken, perform a [domain name \(aka a whois\) search](#) - just simply type in the domain that is desired, and see if it is available.

Website hosting provider

Once a domain name is purchased, the domain then needs to be hosted on a platform so that a website can be created, aka a website hosting provider. As mentioned above, a domain name and website hosting provider are often purchased together, but they can be purchased separately and tied together later.

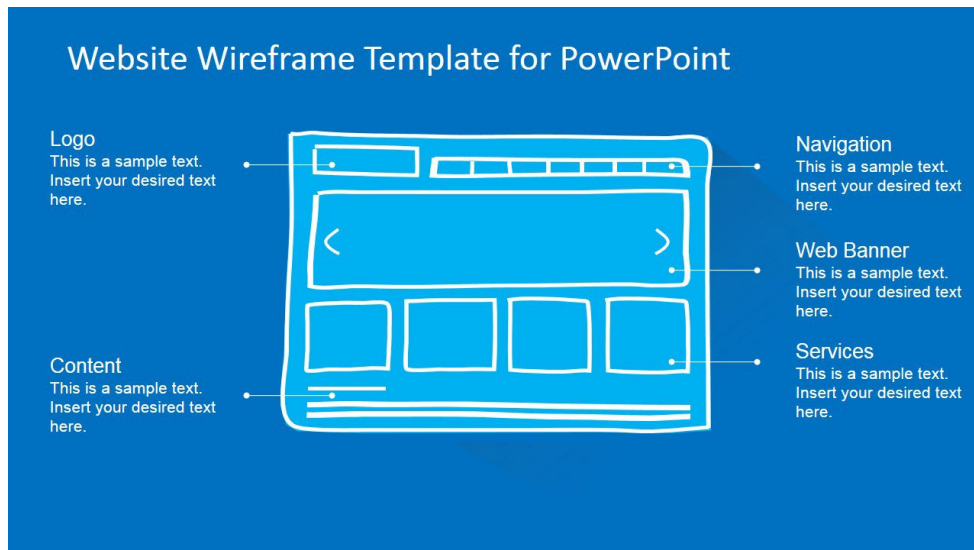
The most common website hosting provider with easy-to-use functionality are:

- [Wix](#)
- [Squarespace](#)
- [Wordpress](#)
- [Weebly](#)
- [GoDaddy](#)
- [Web.com](#)

Pricing can vary greatly depending on functionality needs, design, number of users and more. In general, a village shouldn't spend more than \$100 a month on its web hosting.

Wireframing

Wireframing is the process of visually laying out a website, it's the skeleton or backbone of any website.



Each page on a website has its own wireframe, and it includes all the elements on a page (including header, footer, menu items, embedded elements or link out buttons). The wireframing process may seem complex, but when distilled down it's a very manageable process. Many elements will carry over from page to page, so oftentimes just the guts (or the main content) are all that'll need to be framed out.

Wireframing is a common first step for most website builders and can be done separately or in conjunction with village leadership.

Content

Once the website is framed, then it needs to be filled. Content curation is arguably the longest part of the website development process. It involves the curation of all text, images, video, forms, links, and anything else that needs to be displayed on the website. Existing content can be used, or new content can be developed.

A member or members from the village should be identified to help craft content and source all resources (image, video, forms, etc) that need to be added. It's suggested that all this content live in one central place (Google Drive, Dropbox), so that it is easy for the web developer to access.

Mobile Version

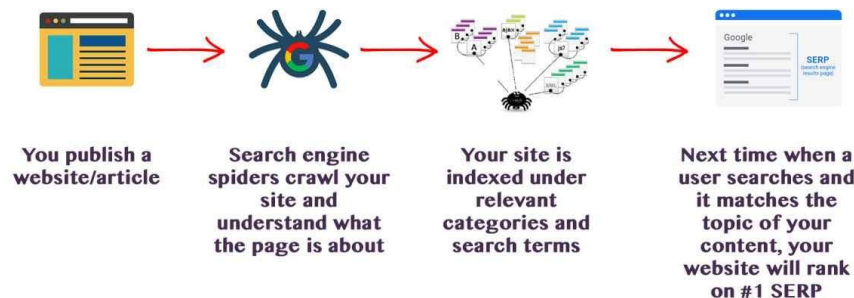
When creating a website, it's important that it is not only web/desktop friendly, but mobile friendly as well, so that members can see a site on the go. Most website hosting platforms have a web and mobile view, so when creating a website, it is important that the web developer creates it in both views for maximum impact.

Please note that a mobile version of a website IS NOT the same thing as an app. An app has some of the same basic principles, but different functionality, setup, and use.

SEO

SEO, or search engine optimization, is a technique used to improve a website's rank within major search engines, namely Google, Bing, and Yahoo. The more optimized a site is, the higher it'll appear in a search, and the easier it'll be for interested parties to find a website.

How SEO works





There are many elements and tactics used to increase a website's SEO, and for the purpose of villages a lightweight SEO should be implemented. Most website hosting providers have a built-in SEO analysis tool that can make small suggestions to help with SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) to improve page ranks.

MEMBERSHIP

A key element of developing a village website will be determining how membership will be integrated, how dues will be collected (if fees are charged), and what each member gets once they join.

Membership can be collected via:

- The website (direct sign-up)
- Online form submission (needs approval first)
- Email
- Phone
- In-person

Once the collection methods are determined, then frequency needs to be defined. Do members sign up once, and then they are done? Is there a renewal needed? If so, how frequent?

If fees are being charged, how much are the fees? Are there tiers? Are donations going to be collected? If so, how are they collected? How does one get a tax receipt if requested?

Is there a member only section on the website? Or within any other systems that the villages use? If there is a member only site, how are pages and content determined to be "members only" vs for the general public.

All of these questions need to be answered via the village leadership committee to determine how the membership pages are created, and functionality is set up.

EVENTS AND SERVICES

Similar to the membership pages, the events and service pages will be the central element of the village's website. Services are recurring offerings by the village, while events are often hosted only once or at infrequent intervals.

A services page should outline:

- The services offered
- How one signs up for a service
- How one can volunteer to offer this service (ie a member wants to help drive another member to an appointment)
- Any associated fees
- Service area
- FAQs
- Contact information

Events, while similar to services, should be a standalone page due to their one-off/infrequent nature. An events page should contain:

- An upcoming calendar, and within the calendar:
 - Name of the event
 - Description



- How to sign up
- How to pay (if a fee is charged)
- How to receive notifications on the event (pre and post)

Clubs within the village (ie Book Club, Movie Club) are a service that has events, so more of a hybrid offering. The village can determine how to market these.

The village's services and events committee can determine what information to show on each page. Additionally, for events the village will need to decide how to collect service inquiries and event registration. Most website hosting providers have a native event registration feature that can aid in this, but additional fees may be required.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Short-Term Goal: To establish a channel(s) to be used as a complement to the village's website to further brand awareness, increase membership, and expand outreach capabilities.

Long-Term Goal: To establish the social media channels to a point where members (current and future) are using it as a means to stay up to date on the latest village news, services and events.

Social media has many, many tentacles. For the average village audience Facebook and YouTube (or similar video hosting platforms) are the only two channels that should be set up if desired.

A content calendar should be used to help organize what to post and when on each channel.

Good social media content calendar examples:

- [Hubspot](#)
- [Asana](#)
- [Buffer](#) - has a free version

COMMUNICATION

Short-Term Goal: To expand the communication capabilities of the village to allow for broad, automated messaging.

Long-Term Goal: To create frequent automated, regular communications in multiple forms - newsletter/email and blog.

Mass communication platform

Beyond a village's website and social media platforms, additional communications will likely be needed. Some villages may choose to do one to one email via personal email accounts or using the lightweight email provider within their website hosting provider, but others may want to communicate at a broader, larger scale. As such, a mass communication platform will be needed.

Main low-cost, easy to use mass communication platforms:

- [Constant contact](#)
- [Mailchimp](#)
- [Mailerlite](#)



Within these systems automated bulk emails can be sent to a list of members. Additional functionality is available as well as needed but may be so at an increased cost.

Newsletter

Some villages choose to produce a newsletter that is typically sent out monthly. Within the mass communication platform, the newsletter can be created and sent out. Most of the mass communication platforms listed above have newsletter templates that can be copied and easily edited.

Blog

A blog is a further extension of the village and addresses specific hot topics or upcoming events. A blog can be posted on the village’s website and can also be sent out via email and posted on social media.

MAINTENANCE

A digital marketing strategy is not something that can be implemented once and left stagnant. It must be constantly monitored and acted upon at frequent intervals.

Each village should identify 2-3 individuals who can oversee:

- Website updates
- Social media posts
- Service and event creation and communication
- Newsletter/email copywriting, list uploading and sending
- Blog copywriting and posting

Maintenance detail:

	Update frequency	Detail
Website	Monthly	Once created, the website doesn’t need to be updated daily, but a monthly look over or refresh is suggested. If a village hosts events those should be added and removed once complete.
Social Media	Daily/Weekly	If the village uses a social media account(s), those need to be monitored daily, and should be updated with pertinent news, services, and events. A content calendar is suggested to plan outposts. Any direct messages or post comments should be monitored and responded to.
Newsletter &	Monthly	If the village has a newsletter, a monthly cadence is probably best. The



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Email		newsletter should be timely and relevant and may take a few days to prepare before sending. Also, when preparing to send the newsletter, it would be best to also update/check the send list as well.
Blog	Monthly	If the village has a blog, a monthly post is best, but can be more frequent based on need. As with the newsletter, a few days may be needed to write, edit and post the blog.
Services & Events	When hosted or launched	<p>For services and events, stand-alone emails should be sent out on a frequent cadence.</p> <p>For services there should be 2-3 emails a year about the service and its impact within the community.</p> <p>For events there should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Promotional email● Reminder email - 1 week out*● Reminder email - 1 day out*● Post re-cap email (<i>optional</i>) <p>*These emails can be automated depending on the event registration software.</p>



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ESTIMATED ANNUAL COST OF TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS (PER ANNUM)

	Domain Name (& SSL)	Website Hosting	Social Media	Mass Communications	Event Registration
Option A	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Option B	\$20-60	\$50-100	n/a	n/a	n/a
Option C	\$20-60	\$50-100	Free	n/a	n/a
Option D	\$20-60	\$50-100	Free	\$0-\$300	Free or paid (or included with website hosting)
Option E	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD

*PRICES VARY DEPENDING ON SYSTEMS USED AND FUNCTIONALITY NEEDS.

Questions or interested in obtaining support from Rave for your technology needs, contact Rave at:

Support@raverockville.org



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