So, what now?

You're ready to start revamping your website, but you don't know where or how to start. Where do you go from here? What's your first step? Here are some very simple and basic steps and ideas to start you off in the right direction, no matter what website platform you use.

When was the last time you updated your site?

Spring Cleaning time! It's boring, and tedious, but cleaning up your website now before you make it pretty is going to help you in the long run. If you create your lovely site and all your links are bad, it might look nice, great even!, but ultimately your website isn't going to help anybody. And that's not good. Wordpress offers a broken link checker, which is a great way to get you started. If your site isn't huge, you can also go page by page and check everything manually. I recommend doing both. Figure out where the broken links are, and once those are removed or updated, go back through your site page by page and really look at the content. Do you really need to have the top 100 books from 1973 listed under "hot off the shelf"? Update your content first, then we'll work on the aesthetics. If at all possible, have a colleague do this with you - two sets of eyes not only covers more material faster, but you can double check each other and ensure you are providing your patrons with the best.

- Recap:
  - Sift through all of your resources - make sure everything is still pertinent information for your patrons
  - Remove or update all broken links
  - Double check your hours, holiday hours, location(s), staff members if listed on the site, everything should be current and correct.
  - Two heads are better than one
  - Don't treat your site as a static page that will never change

Your community

Your ultimate goal is to serve your community and your website should reflect that goal. The best way to learn about your community is to ask your community for feedback! Ask your patrons for input on your site - create a list of basic things for them to find on the site (hours, location, catalog, calendar, etc.) how easy was it? Is

your site patron friendly? Another great way to get community input is to ask the people (and we all know at least one) who either don't use the library on a regular basis or use it at all to look at the site and to try and find the same things you asked your regular patrons. (Don't worry, we'll get every last one of them…eventually.) Non library users can offer valuable perspective on the ease of use of your website.

Keep in mind that information that is necessary to your community (hours, catalog, etc.) and information that is of interest to your community are not always the same thing. Both should be provided on your website. If you have a spanish-speaking community, your site should cater to your community. If your community is heavily involved in performing arts, make sure your site reflects that! We have a very family-oriented community, so we strive to highlight our Early Literacy Programs, Kid and Teen Programs, and homework resources. It doesn't have to be a great, big, complicated page with flashing lights and blinking signs! Simple is good! Just make sure the information is available.

- Recap
    - Your patrons can offer valuable input, don't be afraid to ask them what they want in a website!
        - This can be done using online surveys, in-house surveys, through social networks, during programs, etc.
    - Non-library community members can offer you valuable insight on the ease of use and content of your website.
    - Provide information that is both necessary and interesting to your patrons!
    - Keep it simple and clean.

Your homepage

Libraries have no problem with providing content; we're pretty much black belts when it comes to providing information. The trick is learning to find a balance between offering pertinent information on your site, and overloading your site. Quality vs. quantity is key. Think of your website homepage at the entryway to your home. An entryway is where you welcome people, you offer to take people's coats, you ask if they would like something to drink, tell them where the living room is. If you fill that entry way with your first editions, your best china, authentic Mona Lisa, and prized poodle, you might *think* you're doing a good thing in showing off the best of the best, but realistically, you're overloading your guests. Instead, use this as an opportunity to welcome patrons to introduce yourself, and *then* lead them to the beautiful, mahogany, hand-carved, curio cabinet where you can showcase your prized poodle…I mean china.

- Recap
    - Catalog accessible
    - Hours and Location
    - Quality photos
    - "Entryway" to the "home" - don't cram everything you have to offer here.

Showcasing the prized poodle…china

You've cleaned up your website, you've received feedback from your community, you've balanced out your homepage and you're ready to move on! You have the content, now let's talk about how to *present* the content. Presenting your content can "make or break" your site; this is where choosing fonts, color schemes and images come in. Again, quality is key! There is nothing wrong with wanting to add photos of your awesome programs on

your site, or adding color to your site that matches the color scheme of your library. There is, however, something wrong with choosing a photo that is blurry, washed out, or overly processed/filtered (I used to be *very* guilty of this one). There is nothing wrong with wanting to add fun colors or graphics to your site either, but if the color is the first thing you notice about your site, or if the graphics are pixelated and drawing attention away from the content, then you're missing the target. Your website's color scheme should frame the content and bring attention to it, not away from it. Your graphics should flow with the site - personally, I prefer actual photos, but depending on your site and community, you might prefer simple, quality graphics instead. Above all, make sure you are consistent. If you have fifteen different fonts on your site, colors that clash with each other, a million photos on one page, and only one on another, your site is going to start fighting itself visually and this is not good.

- ● Recap
  - ○ Choose one font and stick with it
  - ○ Choose a color scheme that supports your content, not the other way around
    - ■ I would recommend keeping the majority of your site white (or a very light color; it's hard to read anything on a dark background).
  - ○ Use good quality images and graphics
  - ○ Be consistent
    - ■ There will always be that "one page" where images just won't fit and that's fine - find a balance.

The end of the day

You're a library. That means you have thousands of items of inventory that must go in one, specific location in a big building full of people constantly moving that inventory around. You have to be prepared to answer any question, about anything, from anyone within minutes. Your life is already complicated! Your site doesn't have to make it more complicated! Keep your site simple! Again, *quality* over quantity. If your site has the correct information that's easy to find, it's not cluttered, and the information you provide benefits your community, then you are doing pretty good! Building your site or revamping your site is going to be a learning process, and as your community, technology and your library change, so will your website. When my library set out to revamp our website, we took it one day at a time, listened to our patrons, accepted critique, criticism, and complaints along with the compliments. Don't become so attached to your website that you aren't willing to change. Libraries have been accepting and evolving with change from the very beginning and your website should be able to do the same thing.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to not do this alone. Having someone to bounce ideas off of, or to offer fresh perspective, or even just to give you an "atta librarian!" is so important. If you're by yourself, you risk losing momentum. Seek out other libraries whose websites you like. Ask them how they accomplished it. Ask them what they don't like. Look at local business websites. Ask them the same questions. Businesses are in the...well...*business* of selling their product online. You can learn a lot from that!

- ● Keep it simple
- ● Be willing to change
- ● Accept compliments and complaints all around
  - ○ you can glean valuable information from both of these
- ● Don't do it alone
- ● Draw inspiration from library and non-library websites