

Harnessing Web Power: Network 2 Website



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The Network 2 Website has become a vital access point for communications and resources for veterans, employees, and the organization. Web technologies are being used to bridge previously geographically and culturally distant groups of employees and veterans toward a common cause: *to serve those who have served us so well.*

This session will provide background and insight into web development strategies for serving veteran-interest audiences electronically in the 21st century. This presentation is for those interested in using Information Technologies to provide positive, proactive customer service to veterans, VA employees and related stakeholders.



Learning Objectives

This session will focus on the following learning objectives:

1. To develop a deeper understanding of the role of the website as a strategic communication tool.
2. To gain insights into how website development can integrate and positively impact information flow.
3. To gain a fuller comprehension of the importance of building relationships with content providers.
4. To gain practical skills in identifying and assessing the factors involved in content acquisition and development in the web development arena.
5. To learn practical strategies for working effectively with content providers.
6. To explore lessons learned (mile markers) over the course of the past three years in web development.

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So You Want To Be On The Web...

Be prepared with a list of standard questions for Web Development projects. This guides customers toward refining and providing exactly what is needed as the content expert, so you can focus on development.

1. Mission

What is the purpose of your website? It could be: employee information/awareness; patient information or education; sharing resources; explain policies and procedures; distribute documents; highlight best practices; public relations/media/communications; add value to current services offered; educational or teaching new skills; orientation or help resources; information retrieval or collection via database.

2. Audience

Who is the audience? Does your audience have the access and training to utilize your information in a Web format? Why would they visit your Web page? Is the potential audience large enough to justify investing in Web development?

3. Value

What information or services can you put on the Web that will be of value? Can your site provide organization, time savings, convenience, cost savings, or services not available elsewhere? Are there peer resources on the VA or other websites that will add value? Will people come back for repeat visits?

4. Scope

How many potential visitors would the site affect? How does the content represented on the website fit in with the rest of the organization? How does it reconcile with stated organizational or national goals? (This question helps in assigning priorities when several projects are under development.)

5. Survey the Arena

Is somebody already doing this? What related Web resources already exist? What features or qualities would you like to emulate from other sites? How can you improve or localize what you see elsewhere? What information or service gaps can you fill?

6. Organizing Content Development

Who is the content author or expert? Are all parties represented on the site involved with providing content? What existing documents can provide content? What photos, charts or other graphics will add value to the message? Logistics regarding material in an electronic format. Can Web content be repurposed into alternate media?

7. Conceptualization and Prototyping

What are the main sections of the site? How will it be organized? What will the site look like, what feeling will it portray? What kind of navigation system will be needed? This is among the last steps.

8. Promotion

How will people find the website? Are you utilizing media beyond the Web to communicate with your audience? What other media printed brochures, documents, posters, bulletin boards, displays, flyers, presentations, e-mail, networking, meetings, press releases, etc. Are you putting your URL on everything? What is the public relations potential of your Web project. Does it enhance the internal or external view of the organization?

9. Updates and Maintenance

How often will content be added? How will people know what's new? What will be the process to update information? Encourage assignments and specify intervals. Who will have what specific responsibility?

Find this document electronically with other resources at VISN 2's ITC 2000 Website:

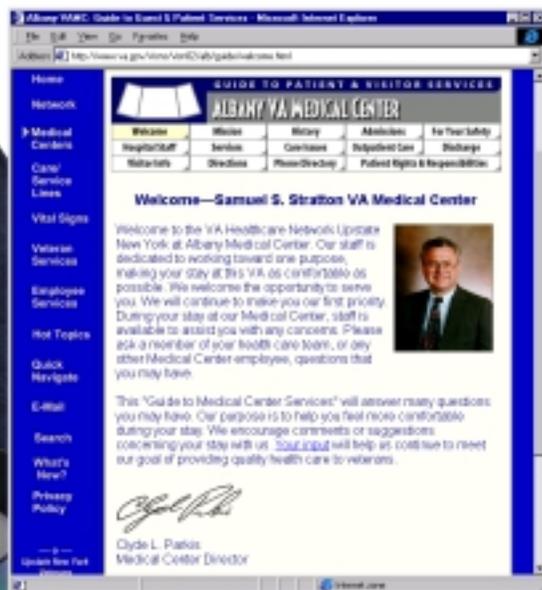
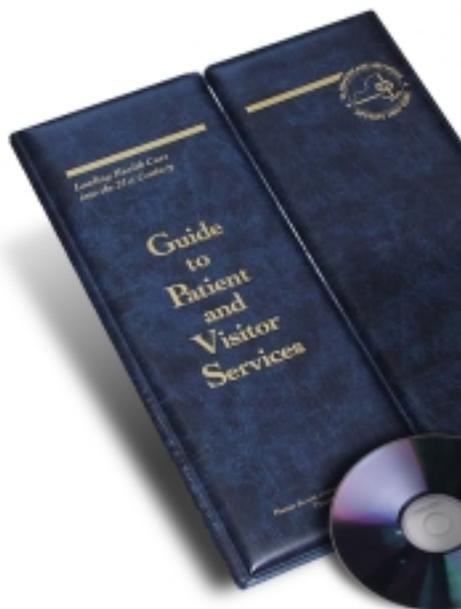
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Case Study: Guide to Patient & Visitor Services



The Guide to Patient & Visitor Services was a project of the VISN 2 Customer Service Council. This project involved creating content for a binder of 15 flip-pages with information useful to a veteran inpatient during a stay at a VISN 2 Medical Center. Content was repurposed into a complementary website version. Alternative formats include language translations and audio formats, each of which will be featured on the VISN 2 Website.

- Through regular participation with the Customer Service Council, it was possible to be involved with the project from early planning stages. Participation in workgroup meetings insured orientation of content for web audiences was a consideration all along.
- Through membership in other Councils, the Web Team's knowledge of Network programs and leaders contributed toward content development and referring workgroup members to subject matter experts.
- VISN Web Team participation helped bring a Network perspective to the project to encourage uniformity of information from site to site. Guide sections provide consistent messages for veterans regardless of location.
- Continuing relationships with workgroup members will lead to additional content in Spanish and audio formats to be repurposed for the World Wide Web.
- The project was an opportunity to gain powerful, pertinent content for veterans, and to update existing Medical Center web content.
- Find more information on this project at: vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/customer/initiatives00/binder.html.

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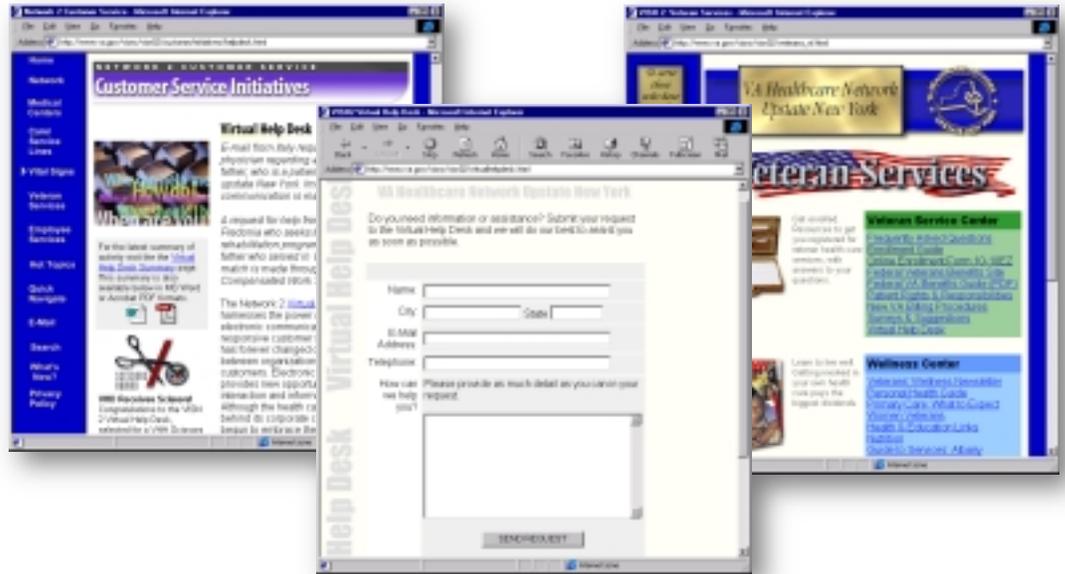
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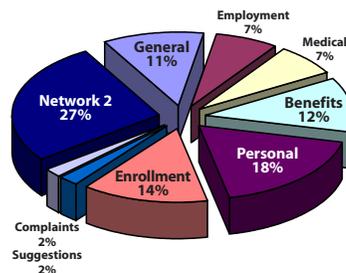
Case Study: Virtual Help Desk



The Network 2 Virtual Help Desk harnesses the power and effectiveness of electronic communication to provide a systems approach for responsive customer service. The Help Desk interacts with customers via electronic mail and provides an effective communication link between VA healthcare professionals and veterans, their families, caregivers, and others.

- From its inception, the website received a high volume of diverse requests for information and assistance from veterans and stakeholders via e-mail. The Virtual Help Desk was created in response to the need for a user-friendly mechanism to meet this demand for information and direct contact.
- Website development in Network 2 is based, in part, on customer feedback generated by the Help Desk, for example, the “Veterans Services: Frequently Asked Questions,” and “Online Enrollment Guide” website sections.
- To maximize the effective use of powerful existing resources, a 25 member Virtual Help Desk Team was established, including subject matter experts, Patient Representatives, and Care Line Liaisons.
- Coordination of Virtual Help Desk requests has been migrated to the Veterans Service Center in order to maximize the availability of available resources and to coordinate this form of communication with other forms currently in place or being evolved.
- Find more information on this project at: vaww.vsn2.med.va.gov/customer/initiatives/helpdesk.html.

**VISN 2 Virtual Help Desk
 January 1998–January 2000**



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Case Study: Care Line News and IOIs (Items of Information)



Network 2 Care Lines provide weekly IOIs to the Network Director and Staff. Tapping into this information flow provides an effective process to generate dynamic news content and share information. This provides the Care Lines with an additional channel of communication as well for both intra-network and external audiences.

- Establishing Care Line News features entailed developing a strong relationship with each of the Care Lines over time. Strategies included offering a customized presentation to each Care Line as part of the web development process. As each Care Line has evolved, the ability to implement this process has become synchronous with their overall structure.
- Content Ownership rests clearly with the Care Lines. Early on the Web Team helped establish a monthly process to compile recent IOIs and select five to ten that were newsworthy, appropriate, and nonsensitive. Each Care Line has identified a champion who serves as a liaison for development of website content.
- Harnessing the power of an existing process was critical to the success of this project. By harvesting the existing information flow, Care Lines are able to provide content without additional work or duplicity.
- Communicating in more than one medium strengthens the ability to share information and promote news and monthly events. This strategy is in alignment with the overall organizational vision.
- Find more information on this project at: www.visn2.med.va.gov/cslines/cslines.html.

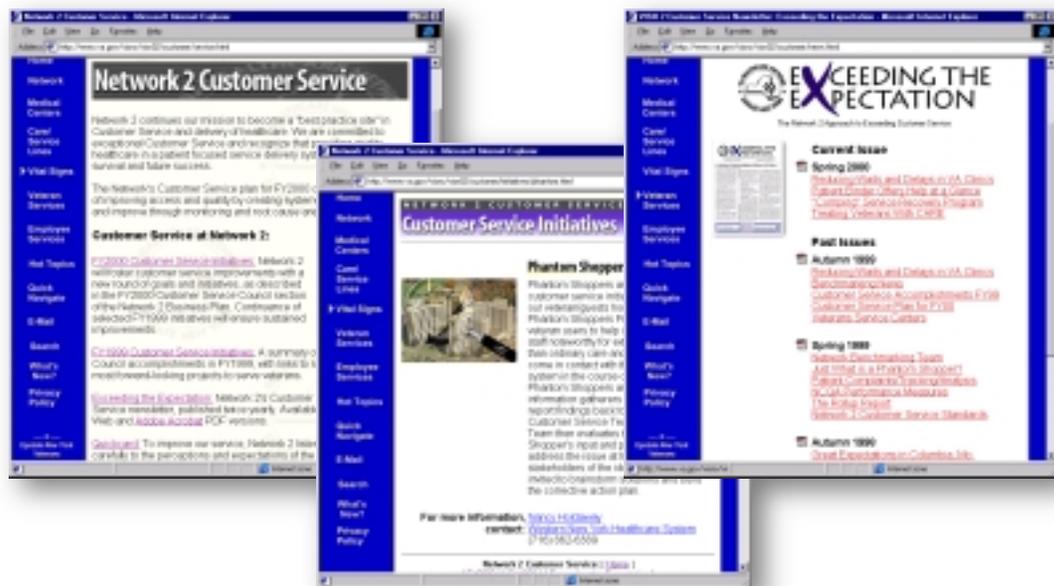
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Case Study: Customer Service Council Website



The VISN 2 Customer Service Council website began as a way to share VISN 2 Best Practices. Starting with a handful of initiative abstracts prepared by the Council, the site has grown to include a regular employee publication, Council workplans, an online Quickcard form for gathering veteran feedback, and a listing of VISN 2 subject matter experts.

- Quality Achievement Award site surveyors asked VISN 2 to share more of its best practices so they could be duplicated elsewhere. The VISN 2 Website has become the venue for showcasing Customer Service Initiatives with veterans, employees and for the network.
- In preparing the Customer Service Initiatives section, the Web Team solicited short, plain language abstracts to accommodate users' reading styles for the Web.
- The Council's semiannual newsletter, *Exceeding the Expectation* was originally a print-only publication; issues are now distributed via e-mail, HTML and PDF. The publication now reaches a greater audience and VISN 2 communications products are now consistent across all media.
- *Exceeding the Expectation* is one of several VISN 2 publications to which the Web Team contributes Web hyperlinks pre-publication.
- The Customer Service site serves as distribution point for an extensive Excel document of VISN 2 employee expert resources, the *Expert Referral Guide*.
- Find more information on this project at: vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/customer/service.html.

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Case Study: VHA Consensus Congress Website



To design the health care system of the future, VHA requested abstracts of best practices from facilities around the country. VISN 2 submitted 34 abstracts, of which 15 were selected for poster presentation at the resulting Consensus Congress of May 2000. Using content originally destined for submission for the event, a VISN 2 Consensus Congress website was created to share this information with a larger audience.

- Upon first internal solicitation for Consensus Congress abstracts within the Network, the Web Team began an early campaign for a companion website which would repurpose content. The short one-page abstract format was ideal for reading habits of website users.
- Except for a few index page comments (taken mostly from VHA's original cover letter) the entire 35 page section of the website came from an existing process.
- Content for each entry on the VISN 2 Consensus Congress website began as Microsoft Word text. Solicitation of abstract authors resulted in several linking their materials with resources such as PowerPoint, Excel, Acrobat files and external Web links.
- Cards containing the VISN 2 Consensus Congress website URL were prepared for poster presenters to hand out in Las Vegas. Authors could forgo the normal process of printing, transporting and distributing stacks of handouts in favor of providing a URL.
- At times the VISN 2 website becomes a reporting area for time-sensitive special events such as Consensus Congress, which can later be retained as useful content.
- Find more information on this project at: www.visn2.med.va.gov/consensus.html.

Find this document electronically with other resources at VISN 2's ITC 2000 Website:
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Strategies for Working Effectively With Content Providers

1. Focus on Communicating Effectively

- Become involved early on in the process.
- Make sure the right players are involved.
- For long range development, consider participating, e.g. Council membership.
- Be clear and concise, leave no room for miscommunication.

2. Get the Big Picture

- Look at existing communication products (brochures, news releases, strategic plans, documents)
- Help content providers to visualize a website
- To share their vision, ask for examples.
- Ask the question: How will this information be meaningful for our audience(s)?
- Paper prototyping

3. Tap into the Information Flow

- Strike while the iron is Hot!
- Harness the power of existing processes, e.g. IOIs, conference abstracts.
- Utilize multiple communications media.
- Patience with Process.

4. Organize

- Establish content ownership.
- Outline content areas and identify components.
- Clarify and define expectations.
- List action items for both parties.
- Identify the specifics of the information requested to make it easy for them to comply with your request.
- Set a deadline.
- Keep a follow up list.
- Plan regularly spaced intervals for meetings.

5. Sustain Momentum

- Dial direct.
- Ensure appropriate review.
- Try another approach.
- Make new linkages for mutual benefit e.g. Education/HPDM.
- Communicate progress.
- Keep the ball in their court whenever possible, especially at halftime.

6. Maintain Balance

- Reflect organizational vision, mission, and values.
- Actively engage in Strategic Planning.
- Review priorities: the Top 100 Project List.
- Balance high impact development with longer range goals.
- Establish an interval-based review process with content owners.
- Ask for what you need.

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Mile Markers

1. You can't push the river.

Sometimes the time is right to move forward, sometimes transitions have to be completed, issues have to be resolved, and organizational culture has to evolve. When the time, the people, and the information is right, Create.

2. Leap forward, but circle back.

Content meaning and interpretation may change over time. Reassess and review existing content for continued value.

3. The importance of Leadership.

The web is a strategic communication foundation for the organization. The work of defining content also brings clarity to the information, the process, and the organization.

4. You get what you pay for.

Invest in quality time, seek courageous supporters, go for the better win.

5. Develop an instinct.

Listen at least as well as you speak.

6. Percolate.

The art of patience.

7. Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

Value your work and learn something new each day.

8. Survivor.

Develop survival strategies to avoid information overload and burnout.

9. Make an impact every day.

Balance long term development projects with quick wins. What's New?

10. Apply passion.

Remember who we all work for: our nation's veterans.

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Electronic Newsletter from the
VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York (VISN 2) Website



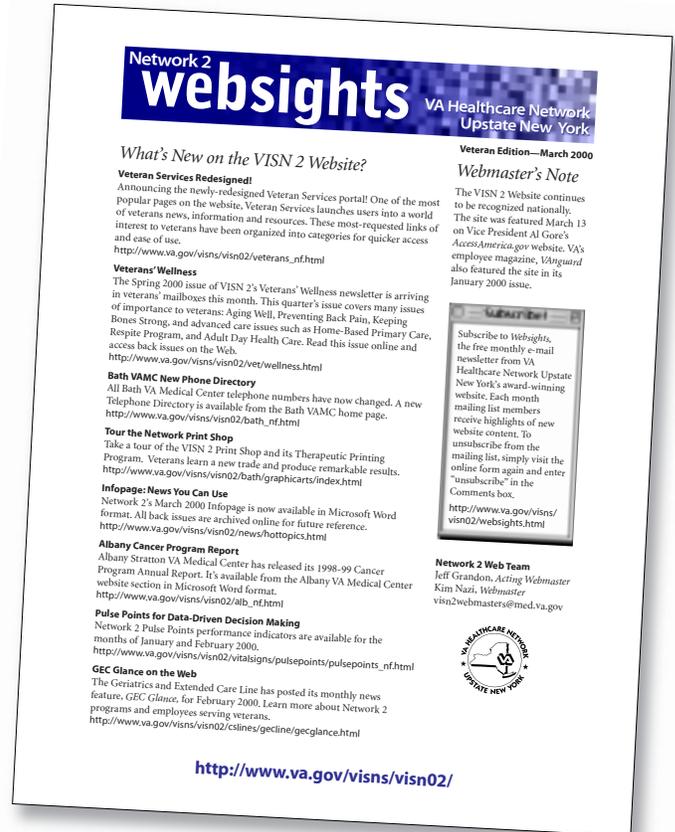
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Subscribe to *Websights*, the e-mail newsletter of the VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York's award-winning website.

You'll get the latest in What's New on the VISN 2 Website, delivered monthly via e-mail for free. Simply provide your name and e-mail address to subscribe today!

Back issues of *Websights* are available from the VISN 2 Website, in Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word formats.

The VISN 2 Website is your source for Veterans health information!



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VA Healthcare on the Web

From VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York (VISN 2)

You'll find all this at the VISN 2 Website:

- Veteran & Employee Services Portals
- Veterans Benefits Guides and FAQs
- Electronic Application for Health Benefits with Online 10-10EZ
- Contact, Travel, and Inpatient information for Upstate VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics
- Women Veteran Health Services
- Virtual Help Desk for interactive assistance and information requests
- Links to VA, Federal, Health, and Veteran Service Organization Resources
- Veterans' Wellness Newsletter, Infopage, and other VISN 2 Publications
- Personal Health Guide plus other Patient Health Resources
- Virtual Quickcard for Immediate Feedback on VA Health Care Services
- Vital Signs Initiatives to Improve Veteran Care
- Care/Service Lines featuring VISN 2 Health Programs and Services
- Patient Rights & Responsibilities
- Community Calendar



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Subscribe to the free e-mail newsletter of the award-winning VISN 2 website.

Each month you'll receive an update of What's New on the website for veterans.

Subscribe through the link on the front page, or contact:

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The VISN 2 Website is the source for Upstate New York Veterans and VA Employee information!

The VISN 2 Website is building a communications bridge linking our nation's veterans and the employees who serve them with information, communications tools, and access to online resources.

Visit via VA Intranet or on the Internet—

<http://vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/>
<http://www.va.gov/visns/visn02/>