Optimize Your Website to Drive Recruitment Leads

Your Volunteer Fire/EMS department’s website is the gateway for potential recruits to learn about your agency, its members, response types, the benefits of joining, and most importantly, the primary way they contact you to begin the process.

Don’t rely on posting incidents and photos on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media – your website needs to be updated and packed with information a potential recruit can easily find when researching where and how to volunteer.

Here are a few tips to optimize your website to drive the most recruitment leads:

1. **Make Sure Your Website is “Responsive”**
   Does your website look great no matter what type of device a potential recruit is seeing it on? People may be accessing your site on their desktop computer, a tablet, or their phone. If your department’s website isn’t “responsive” – meaning it automatically scales and looks amazing on every device – you risk frustrating users (and thus potential recruits) with a bad experience.

   Mobile “versions” of websites don’t always include all of the features and content you want.

   The majority of website visitors these days are checking you out while mobile – and the more you market your recruitment opportunities on Facebook (see below) and other platforms, the higher the number of visitors seeing your website on their mobile devices.

2. **Keep Your News Updated and Recruitment Content Complete**
   In the age of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and the rest of social media, it’s easy to assume your website doesn’t matter anymore. That’s just not true. For routine incidents and photos, you definitely don’t need to post everything on your website every time. But keeping it fresh by posting larger incidents (following the department’s policies on what can be posted), community events, member news, and more is important.

   Plus, platforms like WordPress allow you to easily integrate your Instagram, YouTube, and other online content seamlessly without having to double or triple post in multiple places.
Now when it comes to recruitment content, post every detail you can on your website. Not just a page – but a multi-page, linked together Recruitment section packed with information.

- **Why would someone want to join?** Talk about the family and team environment your department and the fire/EMS service offers. Tell them about your organization, the services it offers, apparatus, call volume, and types.

- **What are the benefits?** Not every “benefit” costs money – like camaraderie, experience, and a new second family. But definitely make sure you do include all the tangible benefits as well. List any department or state specific insurance programs, retirement programs, flexible scheduling (if applicable), injury programs, tuition reimbursement, apparel and PPE provided – and beyond.

- **What training and equipment is provided?** Be specific as to how much time is required for training, how and when it’s typically scheduled, and what, if any, additional costs for personal apparel or even PPE your department requires.

- **How often does a recruit need to be available to volunteer?** This will help screen out those who may not be able to meet your department’s time requirements and set clear expectations for new recruits coming in.

- **FAQs:** Post answers to the top 10-15 most commonly asked questions that you typically get when a new recruit comes to visit your station.

Need more content? Ask your current members to list the top 3-4 things that would have helped them evaluate your department before they joined or things they wish they’d known earlier.

Create an easy to use website address for your recruitment content, such as www.myvfd.com/join, and use that link in everything you do online and off, including your annual fund drive newsletter, community email lists, and fliers at public events like Open Houses.

**And Most Importantly – Include a Short Recruitment Inquiry Form**

This form should be high on the page (especially when viewed on mobile devices). It will collect basic information about the prospective recruit including their name, telephone number, email address, and location along with what type of membership they are interested in (firefighting, EMS, administrative, support, auxiliary, etc.) and why they want to volunteer.

The submissions to the form can typically be sent automatically to your department’s recruitment team.

Whether using a built-in form submission program on your website or a third party form generator like Google Forms or Wufoo, there are many ways to easily integrate this critical lead driver into your website.

**Then be sure to follow up.** The best way to ensure an interested recruit stays one is to follow up quickly, get them into the station for a tour, and on their path to start the application process.

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Need a new Website for your department, optimized for recruitment? Or recruitment marketing and community engagement strategy? **NVFC members get a 10% discount.** Contact Go Forward’s fire service team at 240-667-7754 or via email getstarted@firstarriving.com.
#2 Facebook for Volunteer Fire/EMS Departments

Having a social media presence is a must today for fire departments for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is recruitment (and retention). Posting your latest incidents (making sure content is within department policy), event updates, and more is easy – and a great way to drive someone’s interest in joining your department.

Here are some quick suggestions for leveraging Facebook for recruitment and retention:

**Facebook Campaigns and Unlimited Options to Target Recruits**

Once you’ve got a section of your website dedicated to recruitment, Facebook is among the easiest ways to target potential volunteers with advertising messages about your department, drive them to your website and collect those recruitment form leads.

You can budget as little as $50/month and get an immediate impact from recruitment campaigns on Facebook. You can target by specific demographic, age ranges, those interested in volunteering and causes, and more. Then, you can “boost” posts on Facebook (such as status updates, videos, and photos) or create unique campaigns targeting your selected demographics.

For example, you can target:

- High school/college students interested in Firefighting, EMS, or public service
- Individuals who have expressed an interest in volunteering or causes
- Military veterans

Facebook allows you to choose from a virtually unlimited number of demographics including location (city, state, or mile radius), age ranges, and pre-defined interests as well as by what other pages they follow on Facebook.

On Facebook, videos and photos drive the most engagement. Videos don’t need to be fancy – and they shouldn’t be too long. Facebook ads can also be deployed to Instagram automatically.

**NEVER forget to include the link to the recruitment section of your website on EVERY post that could drive someone to learn more about joining your department.**

Facebook campaigns require a credit card and a separate “Advertising” account set up, which ties back to your department’s Facebook page. You can learn more at https://www.facebook.com/business/.

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Recognize Your Volunteers

Post on your social media platforms as volunteers progress through your ranks – from introducing them when they join to congratulating them when they are turned over on a specific apparatus, complete a course, are promoted, are among your top responders, or receive other special recognition. Include a photo whenever possible and encourage your members to share it.

The quickest pipeline of recruitment referrals to your department come from within. You can keep your current members excited about feeling they are being recognized for their progression – and show potential recruits, your community members, and your members’ families what your organization is all about.

This all is just the beginning! Stay tuned for more updates on ways to leverage social media for Volunteer Fire/EMS Departments.

Google for Non-Profits: Free Stuff, Including Recruitment Ads!

If your department is (or can become qualified as) a 501(c)3 nonprofit agency, you can qualify for some amazing benefits from Google’s nonprofit program, including:

- Unlimited branded email accounts (such as chief@yourvfd.org)
- Up to 30GB of Google Drive and GMail storage
- Google Forms to conduct surveys and event sign-ups
- Google Calendar to manage schedules
- Video conference call hosting for up to 15 participants – desktop or mobile
- Google Ad Grants – Up to $10,000 per month in in-kind advertising
- YouTube Nonprofit Program – Enable donations through your YouTube videos, expanded Call-to-Action features with your videos, and more.

Signing up for Google for Nonprofits takes just a few minutes at https://www.google.com/nonprofits/ -- you’ll need some basic corporate information, so having someone involved who is familiar with that for your department will help.

Key Features Supporting Your Recruitment & Retention

While all of the features that come with Google for Nonprofits will benefit your organization, here’s how a few will REALLY help you:

- Google Ad Grants
  You’ll likely never “spend” the full $10,000 in donated advertising every month, but this amazing tool lets you create search ads that will display whenever someone searches on Google. You can use this for recruitment as well as fundraising, event promotion, and beyond.
  Similar to Facebook ads, you’ll be able to select your target audience by keyword search terms, location, and more. Managing Google ads can be made even easier by using AdWords Express if you don’t have the time or expertise to manage larger campaigns.
• **Google Calendar**
  Share your Google Calendar on your website or otherwise online to display upcoming recruitment events to potential recruits. Plus, you can use Google Calendar internally to share department meetings, training, and even staff scheduling.

• **Google Drive & Google Forms**
  With 30GB of storage (expandable for reasonable costs), you can use Google Drive to share recruit applications, training records for members, and other key documents.
  Need to collect data (like recruitment leads from your website, for example)? Use Google Forms to easily create and customize forms to use independently or place on your website to collect recruit information, for your site’s main contact form, or to let community members sign up for events, request a public education appearance, or reserve your rental hall.

• **YouTube for Nonprofits**
  Beyond just hosting your recruitment and department videos, this YouTube program offers your department a powerful suite of tools to add features to your videos to make them more interactive and drive engagement. Easily add calls to action (such as “Click Here for Recruitment Information,” “Donate Now,” or “Join Now”) to your video in various formats.

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**Grow Your Ranks Today**

Volunteer recruitment can definitely be a major challenge in today’s world, but it’s not impossible. Leveraging the many tools, resources, and platforms available online can drive interest in your department like you never thought possible.

It may seem like a daunting task, and finding the right people in your department who are moderately “tech savvy” is important. A solid investment of time – and an optional modest investment in upgrading your website and marketing your department online – can provide your department the boost it needs to grow.

**Utilize Make Me A Firefighter Campaign**

Remember to use the resources available in the department portal of the Make Me A Firefighter campaign to assist with your efforts. Go to portal.nvfc.org to access tools such as social media graphics, customizable recruitment materials, a recruit tracking tool, recruitment event ideas, and more. Posting your volunteer opportunity in the database also makes it visible to potential recruits going to [www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org](http://www.MakeMeAFirefighter.org), where they can learn more about your department and opportunity as well as utilize an information request form to connect with you.

**Need Help? First Arriving Has You Covered**

Need help with recruitment marketing, setting up Google for Nonprofits, or creating a website that drives the most recruitment, community engagement, and fundraising power? Contact First Arriving’s fire service Web & Recruitment experts at getstarted@firstarriving.com or 240-667-7754. NVFC members receive a 10% discount on all services. Not a member? Join at [www.nvfc.org/BeYourBest](http://www.nvfc.org/BeYourBest).