



# Is Your Website Working for You?

*Presented by Ed Vawter, Charlene Burke, and Heather Carine  
Reported by Phyllis Smith, In the Know Research and Information Consulting*

Ed Vawter, Charlene Burke, and Heather Carine teamed up in this session to provide the audience with practical, actionable ideas to develop a new website or to refresh an old and tired site.

## WordPress

Ed, of QD Information Services, has been on the Internet since the 1990s. In addition to extensive experience with Apple products and using social media to build a strong following, Ed is experienced with using WordPress to develop a functional website that incorporates social media elements. He shared his views on WordPress and offered tips to make a WordPress website even better.

WordPress is easy to use. The free download is quick to install and painless to maintain. A large selection of themes can help customize the look and feel of a website. Many themes are “responsive designs,” meaning that they accommodate the website to the browser, tablet, smartphone, or other mobile devices in order to maximize the viewer’s experience regardless of their device.

A WordPress site can be further customized with plug-ins and widgets. Ed demonstrated several plug-ins, such as a testimonial

plug-in that scrolls client testimonials on the page. Ed’s top four picks included a stronger security tool (Better WP Security; <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/better-wp-security/>), an SEO plug-in that focuses on keywords (WordPress SEO; <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wordpress-seo/>), a spam filter for blog comments (Akismet; <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/akismet/>), and a tool to back up a site to another location (BackWPup; <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/backwpup/>).

WordPress is good for more than just blogs. It’s an excellent option for a small business website because it’s free, easy to install and maintain, has a flexible look and feel, and can be extended with plug-ins and widgets.

## Search Engine Optimization

Charlene is the principal of Search by Burke Marketing Group, an online marketing agency. She spoke to us about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) which is an overall strategy to get the attention of the potential client. Charlene shared four key tips for information professionals to ensure their websites appear in search results.

**Submit to Google and Bing:** Both Google and Bing provide webmaster tools so that the web designer can alert the search



Charlene Burke



Ed Vawter



Heather Carine

engines to the existence of the website and provide feedback to improve the standing of the site in search results. Look for Webmaster Central on Bing and Webmaster Tools on Google. After setting up an account, the tools will walk you through the process. They track the website, highlight potential fixes, and provide additional information.

**Keyword Research and Analysis:**

Charlene emphasized the importance of understanding how people are likely to search and how to use that information to improve your website's standing in searches. She recommends a Google AdWords account ([www.google.com/adwords](http://www.google.com/adwords)), which can be used as an external keyword tool. Bing offers something similar in its own Webmaster Tools ([www.bing.com/toolbox/keywords](http://www.bing.com/toolbox/keywords)). Another option is a free tool offered by Wordstream ([www.wordstream.com/keyword-niche-finder](http://www.wordstream.com/keyword-niche-finder)) that will help to identify profitable keywords. Charlene recommends using tools like the above mentioned to identify the unique terms that differentiate your website, setting it apart so that it stands out to targeted visitors.

Keywords can then appear in Title and Meta Description. Each page of a site needs a descriptive title and it plus the meta description are presented to searchers to help them choose from search results.

Charlene also suggested using WordPress SEO by Yoast (<http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/wordpress-seo/>). This plug-in does some of the thinking for the website designer and identifies focused keywords to enhance website content.

**Linkbuilding Strategies:** Charlene discussed several ways to develop links to your website, including guest writing for selective blogs with links back to your website, using social media to share links

to the site, and sharing infographics. Links to your site are votes of confidence that say your site is for real and worth visiting.

**Content is King:** Charlene reminded us that we need to have quality content on our websites with keywords that resonate with potential clients. This led us to Heather.

**Website Content**

Heather Carine of Carine Research focused on the content of the website. The first question Heather asked of us was, "Are you proud of your website?" She reminded us that a website represents our business and should be attracting potential clients.

Heather shared seven tips for improving the content of a website to attract clients and grow a business. She shared some AIIP members' websites as examples to illustrate each tip.

**Keep it simple:** A simple site with a strong message or image attracts a reader and keeps them on the site. Example: [www.knowteria.com](http://www.knowteria.com) uses bright colours and a strong image and tagline to share a simple message.

**What's your story?** The About page is usually the second most visited page of any site and must provide a compelling story that sells your credibility in the industry, your experience in your field, and your ability to deliver. Example: [www.destricker.com](http://www.destricker.com) clearly sells Ulla's credentials on the "About" page.

**Don't be mysterious:** It is important to tell people where you are located, even in an online world. Example: [www.intellicraftresearch.com](http://www.intellicraftresearch.com) provides clear contact information, including phone, email, and mail so that the potential client knows where in the world the business is located.

**Is it time for a makeover?** Redesigning and refreshing a tired, cheap-looking site could pay for itself in new work. Your site needs to show that you are current with online trends. Example: [www.carineresearch.com.au](http://www.carineresearch.com.au) is Heather's own renovated site that is much simpler, clearer, and easier to update. The new site produced a new client whose project basically paid for the renovation.

**Winning words:** Make your words reader-friendly using easy-to-read fonts. Make your site easy to scan using short sentences and paragraphs. Be concise and use catchy headings that grab attention. Break up text using bullet points. And use your white space effectively. Example: [www.bluesageresearch.com](http://www.bluesageresearch.com) is easy to read and says everything in short, concise paragraphs.

**A picture says it all:** It can be a struggle to find the right image that conveys the central point of a business. If you can find one, the right image can add so much to a website. Example: [www.cottonlovesresearch.com](http://www.cottonlovesresearch.com) uses a simple image that clearly depicts a specialization in American history and cultural heritage.

**Keep it fresh:** Referring back to Charlene's tips for SEO, Heather pointed out that fresh content helps with SEO efforts, adds to your credibility, and helps you to keep your site in line with what you are actually doing. Example: [www.searchbyburke.com](http://www.searchbyburke.com) demonstrates how to regularly feed a site with fresh content by including a blog.

The audience interest in this subject was high, judging from their questions. Ed, Charlene, and Heather offered their views on specific issues, such as whether back-ups by a web host rendered a back-up plug-in redundant, how difficult converting a custom website to WordPress might be, and the role a Twitter feed plays—or does not play—in the quality of the website's content and success in SEO.

Our appetites were whetted and some of us will be referring to our notes and the session slides, as we build new websites or refresh our old and tired sites. ■

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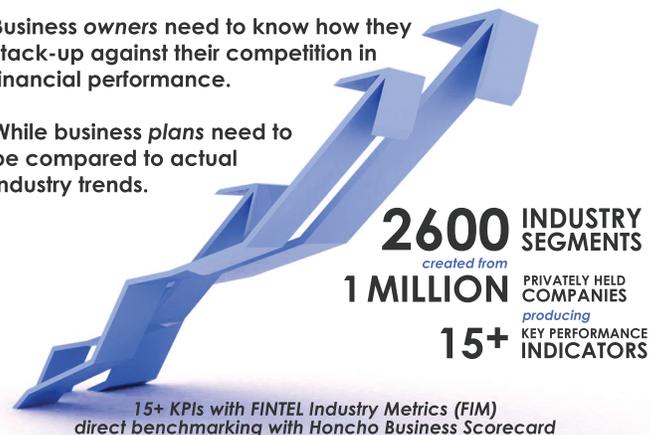
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