



Tangerine

Five Things YOU MUST DO When You Publish Your Planning Document



Introduction

Too often, planners create important and potentially impactful plans that are published in a format that make them difficult to use. Instead of making an impact, these plans end up as hard copies on a dusty shelf or as an online PDF that is difficult to read on mobile devices – the devices your community members use. Don't fall prey to outdated and ineffective methods of publishing your plan.

Lead your agency into the digital publishing future by following these techniques to create and publish plans that people will use and that will make an impact.



1. Make it Searchable

Think about the last time you opened a complex planning document to find information. Did you start reading at page one? Probably not.

Most people do not read a planning document from start to finish. Instead, they will look through the table of contents or an index, or use a search field. As you create your document, make sure to include keywords that people will be searching for in the text of the document, or use a publishing system that allows you to “tag” content by adding keywords to sections or paragraphs of your document. This helps people find the content or section of your plan they’re looking for.



2. Make Sure it's Readable on Mobile

Think about the last time you were searching for information on your smartphone and trying to look through a PDF or at a poorly-designed website. Chances are you gave up.

Half of web traffic to planning websites comes from mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. For many, their smartphone is their only way to access the web. A modern web design technique called "responsive web design" makes your plan easy to read, navigate, and search on any device, including smartphones, tablets, desktop computers, and very large monitors. Responsive web design has quickly become the standard for online publishing.

Before you start creating your planning document, decide on a strategy for how you will publish it on the web so the document is optimized, or at least easily read and searched, on mobile devices.



3. Optimize for Search Engines

Think about the last time you were searching for information from a city. Did you go to the City's website or use a search engine, like Google or Bing?

About half of the traffic to most websites come from search engines. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a process that optimizes your planning document so search engine results include direct links to the correct sections of your document.

There are many SEO techniques that improve search results. A few common techniques are to include keywords that people are likely to use to search sections of your document; to publish individual pages on the web for each section (rather than publishing one long document or PDF); and, to create a specially-formatted index (usually called `sitemap.xml`) that can be used by search engines to find and index all of your plan content.



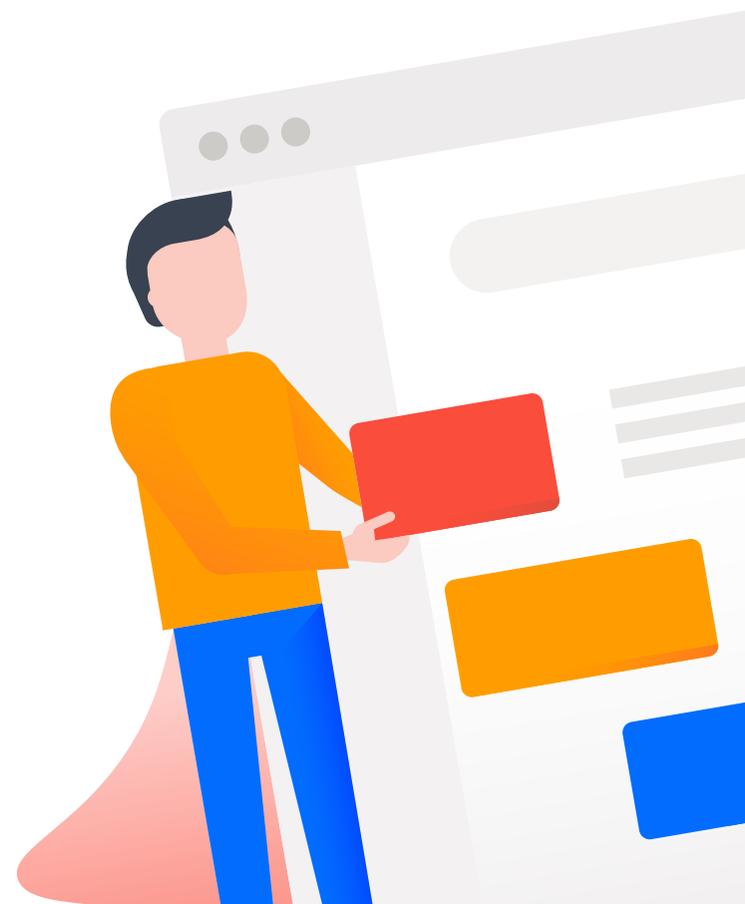
4. Make the Document Universally Accessible

People with disabilities may use different assistive devices, such as Braille displays and audio browsers to, access the web. Websites and documents need to be equally accessible to all. This is not just good business, it is also the law for federal, state and local government websites.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998 requires all federal agencies that develop and use information technology ensure “members of the public with disabilities have access to and use of information and data, comparable to that of the ... members of the public without disabilities.” Many states have adopted similar requirements.

Some modern document publishing systems provide templates and modules to help create accessible websites, and there are a [series of rules](#)⁽¹⁾ you can follow. When you’re ready to publish on the web, test accessibility with tools such as [Webaim](#) and [tota11y](#) to see how well your published plan meets the federal accessibility guidelines.

(1) Visit <https://www.section508.gov/content/build/create-accessible-documents>



5. Common Library of Documents

How often have you searched in one document for an answer to a question, only to find out that the answer is actually in an entirely different document? You know the difference between a specific plan, general plan, municipal code, or zoning code document, but many don't!

As you begin to publish more documents — General or comprehensive plans, specific plans, long-range plans, zoning codes — consider using a common library and online format for publishing. If you do this, a search by a user can return results not just from a single document — but from all the planning documents in your online library.

Once you adopt an online planning document template that includes these best practices, you can leverage the template to create a planning document library your community members and elected officials will love.



6. Personalization – Bonus Recommendation

Think about the last time you were shopping online – perhaps on a website like Amazon.com. Amazon offers you the ability to filter your search results by brand or price, and displays related products to help you quickly and effectively find what you're looking for.

Imagine if a user reading about short-term vacation rentals in a planning document could also be presented with related information about rental housing policies, permits, and homestay rentals at the same time. This would improve the reader's experience by introducing them to other related terms that might better align with what they're interested in.

Some modern document publishing systems allow you to classify sections or paragraphs of your document and programmatically display content with similar classifications to a user who is reading the document.

Lead your community into the future with compelling and useful online plans that communicate clearly, inform decision-making, guide meaningful action, and build stronger communities.

Need Help?

When it comes to publishing online, planners face a dizzying array of technology options. Tangerine software helps you create plans that people will use. You don't need to be a web developer or designer to create compelling and useful online planning documents.

If you'd like help accomplishing these five things YOU MUST DO when publishing your document, we're available. Visit TangerineDocuments.com for more information.

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