

Succeed Speaking Speaker Website Report: What Is Your Website Doing for You?

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What Is Your Website Doing for You?

Setting the Stage

There are a number of items worthy of analysis and discussion in a “speaker website report.” For instance... What are the most important elements? What are the traffic trends? Are some layouts more effective than others? The list could go on and on.

However, the report you’re reading has a very narrow — yet in my opinion, very important — focus.

Specifically, I set out to review 50 speakers’ websites — speakers from a variety of specialties and fee ranges were represented — in search of the answer to this question:

Are speakers leveraging their websites to invite their visitors into a conversation?

In its most basic form, a website can be an online brochure for speakers. In the late 1990s and perhaps early 2000s, this was both innovative and effective. Today, in our Web 2.0¹ world, not so much.

An online brochure does *not* invite visitors into a conversation. It’s one-way communication:

“Hey, look at me. Here’s what I can do. You should book me!”

Why is a conversation so important?

Some of the marketing research I’ve read shows that as many as 97% of website visitors are not in buying mode when they come to a site. Does this translate to the speaking industry? Can we also say that 97% of your visitors are not in *booking* mode?

I don’t have that kind of data, unfortunately, but if you look at your website stats for any given month and compare them to your incoming inquiries in that same month (via phone and email), I’m betting you’ll find a very large discrepancy. If you’d like, run the numbers and let me know what you find — if enough speakers report in, I’ll update this report with the data.

¹ Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web, especially the movement away from static webpages to dynamic and shareable content and social networking (according to Wiktionary.org en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Web_2.0)

Anyway...

The point of all this is, whether it's 3% or 20% or 50% of your visitors who *are* in booking mode, there's no question that a large percentage of your visitors *aren't*. And if your website is nothing but a one-way brochure, that means if someone visits and doesn't like what they see, or even if they like it but can't book you right now, they're gone. You've given them no choice.

So how do you start a conversation with your website visitors?

There are a variety of options.

You could install a "live chat" feature. You could add on a message board. You could link to your social media profiles. One of the easiest and most effective ways, though, is to...

Install a device to capture names and email addresses of your visitors.

Maybe "capture" isn't the right word, because I'm not talking about some violent act of grabbing someone's information against their will. I'm talking about offering something of value to your visitors so they will gladly "raise their hand" and give you their info in return. More on that later.

When you have someone's name and email address — and their permission — you have an invitation to communicate with them for a long time to come (i.e. have a conversation).

Through that communication, over time, you can establish real relationships. You give people the opportunity to come to know you. To like you. To trust you.

And when people know you, like you and trust you, they are much more likely to book you.

This very basic, yet tried-and-true, method of engaging with website visitors is what I was really looking for when I set out to review speaker websites:

How many speakers place an emphasis on capturing leads with their websites?

To add some depth to my analysis, I followed my review with a survey of my Succeed Speaking subscribers, and those findings are also included in this report.

First, here's what I saw with my own eyes...

Let's Take A Look

The first thing I was looking for was some type of sign-up form on the front page. Why the front page? For one thing, a speaker who places a sign-up form on the front page of his or her site is serious about capturing leads, and I wanted to see how many speakers are this serious about it.

That's not all, though.

Research has shown that you only have 3-10 seconds to capture a visitor's attention before he or she leaves your site... potentially *forever*.

With a compelling, attention-grabbing offer, you might be able to get someone to sign in within those 3-10 seconds and then at least when they leave your site, you've got an invitation to continue communication with them. This is priceless.

By the way, "Sign up for my newsletter" does not count as a compelling offer! Who has time to read another newsletter? I'm not saying no one will sign up, but I'm saying many more will sign up if you offer something of value to them — a free report, a free audio, a free excerpt from your book, etc.

Numbers, please

So, how many of the 50 have a sign-up form on the front page?

16 out of 50, or 32%.

If we add in those who have a *link* to a sign-up form from their front page, the number goes up to 21 out of 50, or 42%.

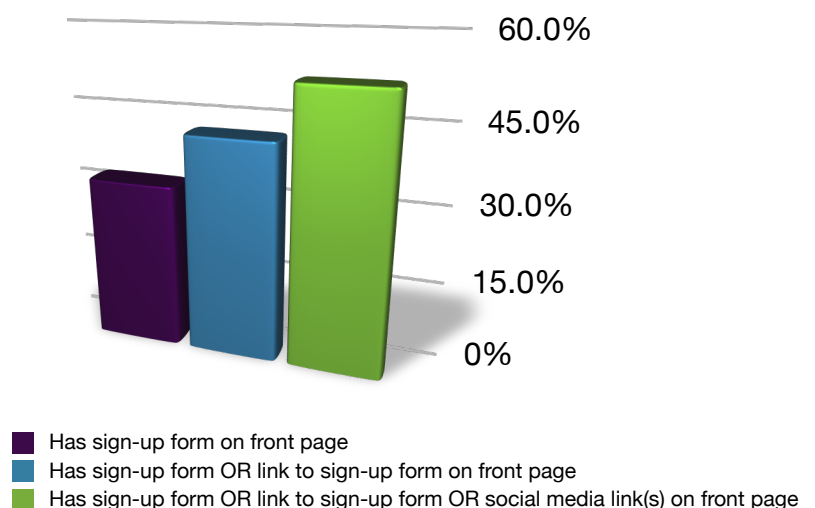
Having a link to your sign-up form is not a bad thing, by the way. It's just that you can't guarantee that your visitors will be on your site long enough to find that page. If you want to maximize your chances of getting someone to share their information with you, the front page is where it's at.

In case you're wondering about social media as the "new age" of email marketing — "Why have email sign-ups when we have Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.?" — I hear you...

While my focus was on finding front page sign-up forms, the overall theme here is: *Does your site give your visitors a chance to engage in a conversation with you?* Social media is all about conversation, so if a speaker links to their social media profiles, I took note of that, too.

Does that dramatically change my findings?

We pick up five more speakers.



So, if we count those who have a sign-up form on the front page, a link to a sign-up form on the front page, or a link to social media profiles on the front page, that's 26 out of 50 speakers, or 52%.

In my opinion, though, a front page sign-up is critical.

Doesn't social media make this obsolete?

To quickly go back to social media...

I do believe that social media is important and can be an effective component of a speaker's marketing strategy. I don't believe it replaces email marketing, though. It's not "one or the other."

Basically, you want to find ways to go where your prospective customers are, and the bottom line is, your prospects are in their inboxes every day... guaranteed. If you can get an invitation to meet them there, why wouldn't you?

Before moving on to my survey of Succeed Speaking subscribers, there was one more layer to my analysis of speakers' websites.

What am I signing up for?

Not only was I looking for sign-up forms, but I was looking for how these sign-up forms were presented. This, again, is another indicator of how much emphasis a speaker is placing on collecting leads.

If, for instance, a speaker has a form that just reads "Sign Up," it looks as if, "I was told I should have a sign-up form on my site, so here it is." This is definitely better than nothing, but there are huge opportunities for improvement... and the fix is quick and easy.

As I mentioned previously, no one is just *looking* to sign up for something. We all suffer from inbox overload. "Sign up" or "Newsletter" means nothing to me as a site visitor. There's no value proposition for me to consider.

At least give me a description of what you're going to send me. Is it just a one-time report? Is it a bi-monthly newsletter? What's in the newsletter? How will it help me?

It was encouraging to see that 76.2% of the speakers who offer some kind of sign-up do provide some descriptive text, so this is not a huge issue... but there's still room for improvement!

An "ethical bribe"

While telling people what they're signing up for is important, there's one more thing you can do to increase your subscription rates: the "ethical bribe."

In other words, offer an incentive.

While I'm not looking to add another email to my inbox just for the fun of it, "ethically bribe" me by offering a solution to one of my problems, or just some kind of interesting "gift," and sure, I'll sign up. Who doesn't like a "free sample"?!

This is definitely under-utilized by speakers. Only four out of the 16 speakers with a front page sign-up form offer some kind of incentive for people to sign up. (And I'm betting their subscription rates are higher as a result.)

Now let's move on to the survey.

What Say You?

I feel like a review of 50 speakers' websites provides a decent sample for us to discuss, but I wanted to add some depth by comparing *what speakers say* to *what I saw*. That's why I invited my Succeed Speaking subscribers to participate in a five-question multiple choice survey. At the time this report was written, 88 speakers had responded.

Question: "What is the #1 purpose of your website?"

That's the first question I asked, and there were four possible responses, plus room for "other" answers. The four preset responses were:

- A brochure to "sell" my speaking services
- An outlet to share my content and establish credibility as an expert in my field
- A lead-generation device to develop a list of prospective clients
- Not really sure; I was just told I need one!

No one selected that last option, by the way, but I had to put it in there just to be sure!

Based on what I found in my review of 50 websites, I concluded that capturing leads is not high on the list of the site owners (only 32% of speakers have sign-up forms on the front page of their sites). The responses to this question provide further support for that conclusion:

Only 8.0% of the speakers surveyed said "lead generation" was the #1 purpose of their site.

This could be a subject for further discussion, because you need leads to book dates, and websites can be excellent lead generation tools.

I'm not going to read too much into that right now, though.

Where I was most surprised on this question was in the number of speakers who selected option one: a brochure. I was surprised because, based on my observations, I would have expected 40-50% of speakers to say their site's #1 purpose was to serve as an "online brochure" — that's about how many of the 50 speakers' sites I would have labeled as such in my review.

Now just to be clear, a brochure-like website can look very nice. It's not a "bad" site by any means. I just don't believe it's the best use of a speaker's web real estate. Or put another way, I believe just a few tweaks can significantly enhance a brochure site and make it a more effective tool.

So what were the actual numbers?

Just over 26% of speakers selected the first answer (brochure).

The majority of the speakers who participated in the survey (55.7%) view their websites as primarily a vehicle for sharing content and establishing credibility, which is a good answer. Content is valuable. As a matter of fact, I just read this quote from Marcus Buckingham this week:

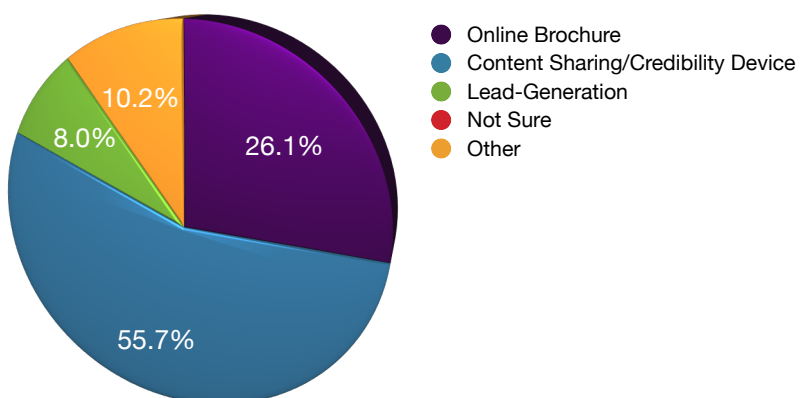
"If you want to engage your employees or keep your customers, teach them something. Learning always leads to loyalty."

If you are teaching through the content on your website, then you are providing solutions and at the same time, showcasing yourself as an expert provider of said solutions.

So what about the "other" responses to this question?

Most were some variation of "all/combination of the above," so nothing shocking there.

Here's the graphical breakdown of the responses:



What is the #1 purpose of your website?

Question: “Do you communicate regularly with your email subscriber list?”

This was a simple Yes or No question and 60.5% of respondents answered Yes. This was encouraging to see, but it does raise some questions:

If the majority of speakers are sending out regular email marketing messages, why do only 8.0% place priority on lead generation?

If you already have an email marketing system in place, wouldn't you want to funnel as many leads into that system as possible?

Here's why I believe this is so important:

Since we know that the majority of your website visitors aren't calling or emailing about booking you on their first visit, getting prospective clients on your email list — and communicating regularly with those on your list — is the key to being ready and waiting when they *are* ready to book.

With the right approach (i.e. “ethical bribe” plus quality follow-up content), you can realistically bring 10-20% of the leads you're losing — that's 10-20% of those 97% who aren't ready to call you or email when they visit your site — into your email marketing fold.

In other words... you could increase your number of leads by 10-20% per month!

Getting the leads, getting an invitation into their inbox... that's just the beginning. *Having* leads doesn't mean anything unless you nurture and grow those leads into customers. That's where the ongoing email communication comes into play. Over time, you'll build a relationship with your subscribers, which ultimately will lead to speaking opportunities...

Or will it?

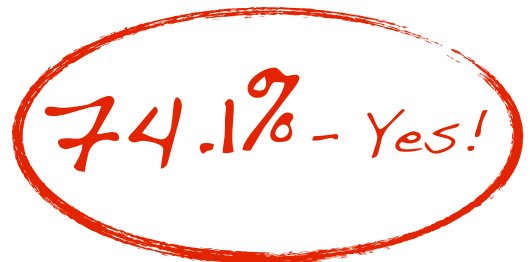
Question: “Have you found your email marketing to have a positive impact on your business?”

For those who do regularly communicate with their email subscriber list, I asked a follow-up question. Essentially I wanted to know:

Is it working for you? Is it contributing to your business?

By now you can probably tell that I'm a big believer in the power of email marketing. My word doesn't mean anything, though. What do your fellow speakers say?

Nearly **75%** of the survey participants said yes, this has made a positive impact on my business.



74.1% - Yes!

You really don't know what email marketing can do for your business until you try it — and stick with it for an extended period. As a quick personal example, I've been publishing the Succeed Speaking weekly newsletter for just under six months and in that short time, it's yielded speaking invitations, partnership inquiries, and interview requests that wouldn't have come otherwise.

Just as a heads-up: You will tick some people off along the way, too. That's just what happens. (If everyone loves you, I'd be worried.)

In all seriousness, another benefit of regular email marketing is that it helps you separate those you can help from those you can't. You don't want to be wasting your business resources on people who aren't compatible with what you offer.

Back to the survey...

We can't ignore the 25.9% who said "No, email marketing has not had a positive impact on my business."

Is it possible that some speakers are in a unique market or have a specialty that limits the effectiveness of email marketing? Sure.

Is it possible that some speakers' email marketing practices could be improved to have a more positive impact on their businesses? Absolutely.

There are some "keys to success" in email marketing just like anything else.

Question: "Why do you not communicate regularly with a subscriber list?"

Given the apparent effectiveness of email marketing — 74.1% of survey respondents say it has helped their businesses — the big question then, is, why isn't everyone doing it?!

Not too surprisingly, the #1 response (38.9%) was "not enough time." Speakers run lean — often solo — businesses and it's hard enough just to take care of the urgent items on your to-do list. How could email marketing possibly fit into the mix?

If you're among those who are not engaged in regular email marketing because of time constraints, I'd encourage you to take another look at your options.

Email marketing platforms like AWeber, GetResponse and MailChimp — among so many others — make it rather easy to manage your list, install forms on your website to collect email addresses, and then schedule content delivery.

As for the ongoing operations (particularly content creation) there are some shortcuts you can take and you can even put the whole thing on autopilot if you want to. Just tap into your vault of existing content and you'll likely have enough material to schedule automatic delivery for a year or more!

NOTE: You don't have to do a weekly newsletter, just in case that's what you're thinking. You can preset what is called an "autoresponder" with a series of messages that will be delivered according to the schedule you set... that's how you can set up a system *once* and then let it go on autopilot.

This is one way email marketing can help your business run more optimally.

For example, unless you're fully staffed, you probably have a database of leads right now that you know you *should* be following up with, but you just can't get to them. Right? Among these are some that, if you could stay in touch with them regularly, could be nurtured into solid relationships that would eventually yield bookings.

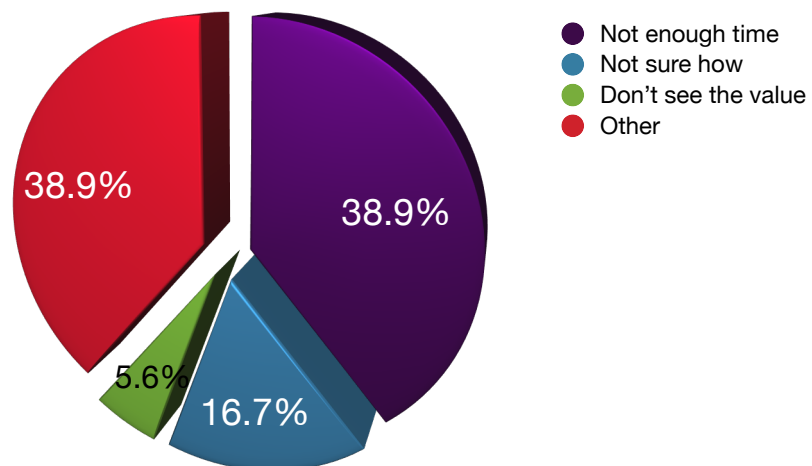
A properly designed autoresponder series could be your solution. Is it a *perfect* solution? Maybe, maybe not. But it's better than no follow-up at all.

(By the way, I've already stated that I run a small shop here, too, and we're putting into practice exactly what I'm talking about here.)

Returning to the survey:

- 16.7% report that they aren't sending out regular messages because they aren't sure how to set up the system
- 5.6% don't see the value in it (I'm glad to see this is such a low number, given that the vast majority of speakers engaged in email marketing are seeing benefits from it)

The remaining 38.9% of survey participants are divided among the "other" category, with answers ranging from "I'm working on a list right now" to "getting back to it again" — for the most part, answers that indicate that they see the value, but for one reason or another all the pieces of the puzzle haven't come together yet.



Why do you not communicate regularly with a subscriber list?

Question: “How do you manage updates to your website?”

Website management is a challenge for any small business owner, and it's usually handled one of three ways:

- DIY: do it yourself
- By a webmaster on staff (either full- or part-time)
- By hiring a freelancer as needed

Of the speakers who responded to my survey, 35.4% manage their own website updates while almost 65% depend on either an on-staff webmaster or a freelancer.

There are actually pros and cons to both arrangements:

When you do it all yourself, the upside is that you're in control. Your ability to update your site is only limited by your personal ability. And as far as that goes, I highly recommend the WordPress platform for any DIY speakers — it's about as user-friendly as it gets from my experience. (And WordPress is not just for blogs, by the way.) The downside to DIY web management is that unless technology and/or website development is your area of expertise, time you spend working on your website is time you're not spending doing what you do best: creating and delivering content.

When you have help with your website management — particularly when that help is on staff — then you can truly do what you want to do when you want to do it when it comes to your website, provided that other projects aren't clogging up workflow. Where freelancers are involved, the downside is that even a quick, easy update will cost you some money. When you have a talented web partner on your side, though, your added productivity outweighs the cost.

If you're interested in freelancers, by the way, here are a few websites you might want to look at:

- [Freelancer.com](https://www.freelancer.com)
- [Elance.com](https://www.elance.com)
- [vWorker.com](https://www.vworker.com)
- [odesk.com](https://www.odesk.com)

Obviously, checking references and reviewing someone's past work is critical.

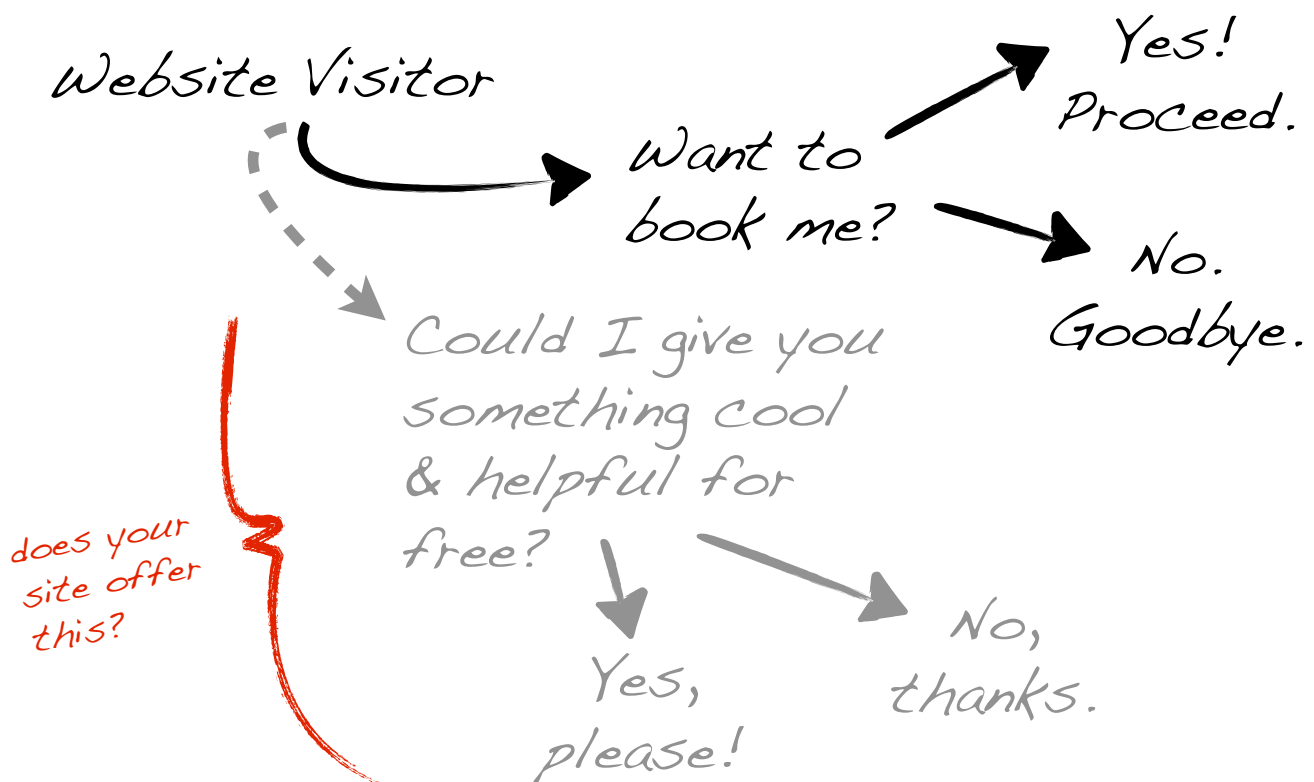
What Does All of This Mean?

There's been a lot of talk about email marketing in this report, but I want to make sure that doesn't overshadow what this is *really* all about. Email marketing is just a device — and one that I believe can be used very effectively — to address a bigger issue:

Most of your website visitors aren't submitting booking inquiries. You can either accept that as "just the way it is," or you can offer your visitors other ways (and reasons) to connect with you... so you can engage in a conversation with them and in time, perhaps win another client.

My belief is: If you have someone on your site, present a variety of ways for them to engage with you. Don't just present the "book me or exit" option. There's no reason to think that someone who's not ready to book today — and thus won't submit an inquiry (maybe because they're afraid they'll get a sales pitch in return or *maybe* because they don't want to "bother" you) — won't want to book you in the future. It's up to you, then, to do everything in your power to make sure they don't forget about you!

In case you're a visual person like me, here's an illustration of what I'm talking about:



Does that make sense?

Here's the bottom line:

You work hard to design your website and attract visitors. Once they're there, create as many opportunities as possible to start a conversation with them.

Just the Facts

Want to skip all the commentary and just see the hard numbers so you can draw your own conclusions? Here you go!

From my review of 50 speakers' websites...

Criteria Being Evaluated	Number of Sites	Percentage of Total Reviewed
Has sign-up form on front page	16	32.0%
Has sign-up form OR link to sign-up form on front page	21	42.0%
Has sign-up form OR link to sign-up form OR link to social media profile(s) on front page	26	52.0%
Offers incentive for signing up	4	25.0%*
Provides description of newsletter or other content to be delivered	16	76.2%**

*of all sites with a sign-up form on the front page (16)

**of all sites with a sign-up form (21)

From my survey of Succeed Speaking subscribers...

What is the #1 purpose of your website?	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
To serve as a brochure to sell my speaking services	23	26.1%
To serve as an outlet to share my content & establish my credibility as an expert/authority in my field	49	55.7%
To serve as a lead-generation device to develop a list of prospective clients	7	8.0%
Not really sure	0	0.0%
Other	9	10.2%

My survey (cont'd)

Do you communicate regularly with an email subscriber list?	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Yes	49	60.5%
No	32	39.5%

If you do communicate regularly with an email subscriber list, have you found this to have a positive impact on your business?	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Yes	43	74.1%
No	15	25.9%

If you do <i>not</i> communicate regularly with an email subscriber list, why not?	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Not enough time	14	38.9%
Not sure how	6	16.7%
Don't see the value	2	5.6%
Other	14	38.9%

How do you manage updates to your website?	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
I do it myself	29	35.4%
I have a webmaster on staff (part-time or full-time)	34	41.5%
I hire a freelancer as necessary	19	23.2%

About the Author

Shawn Ellis is a sales and marketing enthusiast with specialized expertise in the speaking industry. He is founder and president of The Speakers Group and has been booking speakers for events since 1999. Since 2004, he has also served as a manager and marketing consultant to speakers and through his Succeed Speaking initiative, he shares weekly insights and advice to help speakers have more fun, reach more people and make more money with their businesses.

Learn more at www.SucceedSpeaking.com.