501 WORKS

DESIGN TO DAZZLE

A practical guide to elevate your websites and dazzle visitors without breaking the bank.

DESIGN ON A BUDGET TO DAZZLE YOUR VISITORS

Websites are no longer a luxury for associations. Our customers expect them to always be available, offer a good user experience and work seamlessly on a variety of different devices. And just for fun the technology landscape is constantly changing! It is enough to give even the Pros a good headache. How do you accomplish this on a budget? Its not easy! Fortunately, there are a lot of great tools available to help overcome these challenges.

The **501Works** team has assembled this guide to help with your website journey. We've combined our expertise, experiences, and client successes to provide resources and tips that will set you up for a successful website initiative. While not exhaustive, these are some of the exact same tools we use everyday to craft solutions for our clients (*and* they won't break the bank).

Below is a list of topics we are covering in this guide. Know of a good tool we missed?
Please let us know at **design@501works.com**.

TOPICS

WEBSITE BASICS

When we go to a website (like https://501works.com), we are actually interacting with a number of different technologies working together to present and deliver the website we are visiting. Much like a cake, you need the layers working together to create a *delicious* experience. As we dive into the various resources we are highlighting in this guide, we want to make sure we are all on the same page when it comes to publishing a website.

Content

Website Platform

Website Hosting

Domain Name

When choosing the size and scale of your hosting and platform, it is important to plan for spikes that may happen around big events like an annual conference or peak membership renewal. Nothing is worse than launching a big initiative only to have your users stymied by bad website performance.

Domain Name

The domain name for your website is secured through a "registrar" which you reserve for your business to use. Each domain name is tied to a specific "top level domain" or "TLD." The most common TLDs are .com, .net, .org, .gov, .edu and .mil although there are now more than 3,000 recognized TLDs. Many domain marketers will try and sell you on "protecting" your brand by registering every extension. With over 3,000 TLDs that would be cost prohibitive which is why we recommend sticking with the basics - .ORG and .COM for the association industry.

Website Hosting

In order to publish a website, it has to be connected to the Internet. It also needs to be available 24 hours a day, be secure, be fast to access for your users, etc. While speed and security apply at several levels of this chart, it all starts with the foundation of your website host. Cloud computing has ushered in an era of very capable hosting services at reasonable prices. Hosting should be tailored to the type of website platform you will be using and should include plenty of room to grow to handle times when your usage will spike.

WEBSITE BASICS

Website Platform

This is the software you use to publish your website. Currently the most popular platform available is WordPress, running approximately 60% of all websites. But it is by no means the ONLY solution. The platform you choose should fit into the technology landscape of your organization and typically needs to work and play well with the other applications you manage. You may also need to integrate together multiple applications to accomplish all the things you need to do with your website. Since this is a very important decision, we recommend you consult an expert at this stage to help you weigh the pros and cons of the various options that are available.

Content

This is the good stuff! The reason people are visiting your website. For our purpose, content is going to cover the whole design – graphics, video, articles, animations, and documents. All the various ways you can communicate with your audience. However, moving past basic articles and documents can get expensive fast. There are websites that sell a single image for thousands of dollars. Not to worry, in the pages that follow we are going to share a number of the actual tools we use to deliver first class content that won't break the bank.

> **Don't forget about accessibility. Depending on your audience, you may have 10% or more of your visitors needing help with the accessibility of your website. Visit our Accessibility page to learn more.**
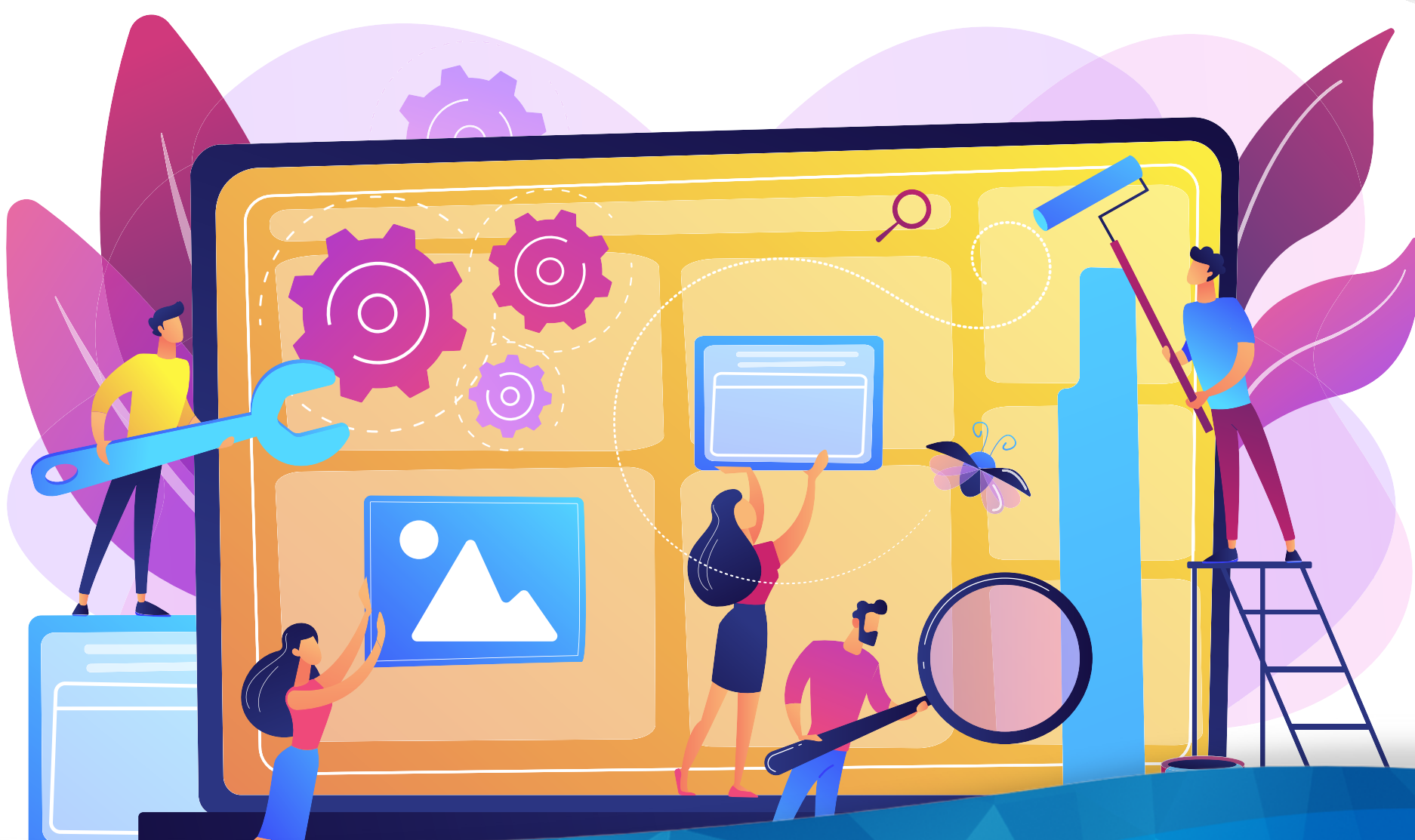
TOP TRENDS IN WEB DESIGN

Website design is incredibly subjective and every where you look you will find plenty of articles on "Top Design Trends" that you should be following. Just try Googling "website design trends" and you can quickly find yourself heading down a pretty deep rabbit hole. Finding the right design elements to fit your needs very much depends on the type of website you are creating.

Here are some common questions to ask yourself when thinking about your design:
- Who is my audience?
- What are my goals for the audience when they visit my website?
- How frequently will the content on my website change?
- How much content do I have available?
- Are there problems I am trying to solve for my users?
- What sort of devices will people use to visit my website?

> Put your visitor's need first and don't worry too much about following trends. <u>Useful</u> never goes out of style.

These are just a few of the questions it is important to consider. If you are an organization of business professionals, creating a website of bold pink-haired punk rockers is probably not the right approach, even if it fits one of the current "design trends" that are popular. Just like in high school, following a trend can make you look foolish.

At the end of the day, clean, classic websites that function well across a variety of devices and allow users to quickly fulfill their needs is something that *never* goes out of style.

There are a few places we go to get good design ideas and see what others are doing. Bookmark the websites below so you can use them as a guide, as you think about your own design objectives.

TOP TRENDS RESOURCES

- CreativeBloq
- 99Designs
- Elementor
- Medium
- 501Works Gallery

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

During the stone age of website design (like the late 1990s and early 2000s) a lot of websites were basically hand coded HTML documents where each individual page was assembled by a Web designer. As the industry matured, so did the available tools. Packages like Adobe Dreamweaver and others allowed pages to be coded faster. But there was still a need for people that owned and generated content: the marketers, membership managers, event hosts, etc., to be able to get their created content published faster. This led to the creation of Content Management Systems (CMS).

Modern CMS platforms have grown and expanded their capabilities over the years. But no CMS is perfect. Because CMS platforms work to simplify the process of creating a website to a very basic "point-and-click" level, there is a lot of complexity under the hood. No matter what CMS platform you choose, be mindful of the fact that you may run into situations that require technical expertise from a Graphic Designer or a Software Engineer to assist with the CMS software.

There are dozens of CMS packages available. Below are links to popular open-source packages which will fit the needs of most organizations without expensive license fees. Note that open-source does not mean free – you still need to make sure that the selected package is setup correctly and configured by a professional to ensure your CMS will perform well and be secure for your users.

WordPress is currently the most widely used CMS platform with approximately 60% market share. Out of the box, WordPress is not much of a CMS. It depends on "plugins" to make it smarter.

CMS

- WordPress
- Drupal
- Joomla
- Umbraco

Web Builders

There is a new class of services known as Web Builders – services that allow you to create a website from scratch and host it on their systems. While these platforms are suitable for small applications, most organizations find them a bit limiting for their mainstream websites.

Examples include: **Shopify**, **SquareSpace**, **Webflow** and **Wix**.

PLUGINS

Many open-source systems offer the ability for 3rd parties to create extensions or "plugins" that add extra capabilities to the base system. In a typical WordPress installation, it is not uncommon to see 5, 10 or even 15 plugins being used in combination with the base WordPress platform to provide the complete CMS platform for a website.

It is important to note that not all plugins are created equal. Some are created by professional software publishers while others are published by dedicated individuals within the open-source community. Sadly, some are published by people with less than honorable intentions. Look for plugins with large number of installs, offers support and has good reviews. Choose wisely and when in doubt consult a professional for guidance!

Elementor is a WordPress plugin that allows you to more visually drag-n-drop Web page elements, widgets and the sections of a page. It lets you style in place in real time and even offers you control of the responsive views of the page. When 501Works builds a WordPress site, we start with Elementor's Hello Theme and Elementor Pro's plugin. It creates a blank canvas for us to build sites the way our clients want as opposed to trying to fit it all into a pre-built template. Taking this approach makes your website almost limitless in the type of design you can achieve.

The WordPress catalog contains more than 55,000 different documented plugins. Word to the wise – only choose commercially supported plugins with a wide install base.

POPULAR PLUGINS

Elementor – Web page Authoring

Avada – Web page Authoring

Webnus – Modern Events Calendar

Site Kit – Google Analytics

Yoast – SEO

All In One – Backup and migration tool

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WHAT DOES ACCESSIBILITY MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF A WEBSITE?

The simplest answer is that you want your website to be useful to the widest possible audience. Associations are about bringing people together for a common mission and that means that our communication vehicles need to accommodate those of us that may have difficulty accessing them.

According to the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), this means providing accommodations for a range of potential disabilities including: auditory, cognitive, neurological, physical, speech and visual impairment.

See W3C for more information at **https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/accessibility-intro/**

Accessibility definitely takes effort and planning, but when done correctly it can greatly enhance the reach of your website. Plus you might just find your site improvements appeal to an even wider audience than you may think.

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES

- digital.gov
- [W3C WAI](W3C WAI)
- WAVE
- Accessibe.com

The Digital Accessibility Foundation is offering a free online course to get you up to speed on this important topic. Check it out here: https://www.w3.org/WAI/fundamentals/foundations-course/

IMAGES, PHOTOGRAPHY & ICONS

Just do a quick Goggle search on any topic and you are likely to get a few hundred (thousand) image options returned. The problem is that most of those are going to be under copyright and using them can have some very negative consequences. No one wants to get a nasty email from a law firm with a cease-and-desist order or worse a demand for thousands of dollars because you accidentally used a protected image. Plus, we are talking about using these images on websites, so it is easy for copyright holders to scan the Internet to find illegal uses of their content.

Good news! There are many great resources for finding high quality images, pictures and icons that can be licensed for use in a variety of website projects. We have noted some of our favorite resources below. These sites offer a variety of low-cost to free options. They also offer different license options so you can find images that will work for your website as well as other potential marketing needs like a print brochure. Most of these sites offer a preview option where you can download a watermarked version of the asset to try in your design free of charge. This try before you buy allows you to check out different treatments at little to no cost.

Most of these sites offer different purchase levels so if there is something special you want to do with an image – like making it a major piece of your brand campaign – you can purchase more exclusive rights or larger scale licenses. Unlike the old days, there is such a wider variety of content available that you seldom run into someone using the exact same image. While it happens from time to time, the cost effectiveness of these new image sources makes them well worth the price.

A quick note about Font Awesome. Their professional level package is very cost effective and contains thousands of different icon options. It can be a real time saver and add a nice spark to your designs as opposed to just using plain text or stock icons.

RESOURCES

- iStock (now part of Getty)
- Envato (Digital Assets)
- ShutterStock
- pexels.com
- pixabay.com
- FontAwesome

When licensing an image, it is important to get the right resolution – usually high resolution. You can always scale down an image for use different uses, but you can't blow them up without losing quality

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PUTTING GRAPHICS TO WORK

Once you find the perfect image or graphic, it still may need to be tweaked a bit to be useful. You might need to change colors, resize it, flip it, etc. But not everyone has spent a decade+ mastering the intricacies of Adobe Creative Cloud.

First, make sure you have graphics that are usable. Both vector and raster graphics can be used depending on your needs.

Creative Boom has one of the best lists of free/low-cost resources for a variety of needs. Check it out…

Vector graphics: Vector graphic means they are fully scalable without losing quality. Here are the common vector graphic formats:

- **.ai:** Short for Adobe Illustrator, this file is commonly used in print media and digital graphics, such as logos. Unless you have a copy of Adobe Illustrator, you may not be able to open or use it.

- **.eps:** Encapsulated PostScript is an older type of vector graphics file. .eps files often don't support transparency. This is really only used for print.

- **.pdf:** The Portable Document Format is built for the exchange of documents across platforms and is editable in Adobe Acrobat.

- **.svg:** The Scalable Vector Graphics format is based in XML (a mark-up language used widely across the Internet that's readable by both machines and humans). It's useful for the web, where it can be indexed, searched and scripted.

- **Raster graphics:** Rasterized graphics are not editable but are ready to use right away. They come in formats like .jpg, .gif, .png and a few others. For website purposes, .jpg, .gif and .png all work well.

Make sure that when you license graphics, you get the right formats. And, if you have an artist do work for you, make sure you have them deliver the components they use (any images they have licensed in high resolution) as well as the final product you will be using on your website.

FINDING HELP

Sometimes you just need a helping hand. There are a number of resources that will work by the job and can give you good, quick results. If you just need a graphic updated or some banners customized, you might try one of the freelancer services below:
Fiverr, Upwork, Dribbble

Watch your sizing! Make sure to get graphics "web ready" by sizing them appropriately. Nothing is more frustrating to a user than making them download a 10 MB image on a mobile website where they are only seeing a 1" by 1" view of it – make sure you stay user friendly by scaling images.

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VIDEO AND ANNIMATION
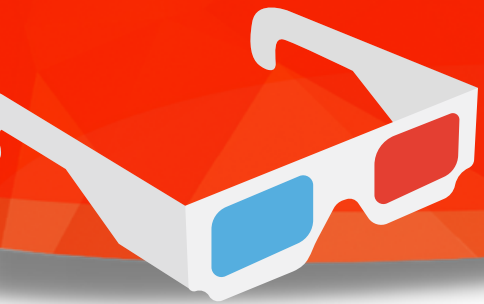
Video and animation are incredibly powerful design tools for modern websites. Videos can range from slickly designed marketing pieces to recordings of past Webinars to little snippets used to explain a particular topic. These are generally self-contained pieces of content. Because videos can be real bandwidth hogs, they need to be given special attention for hosting. Please see **Video Hosting** section for more details about the best way to deploy video content on your website.

Animations & Micro-animations

Animation simply means something is moving. Animations and the movement they create can help you draw the user to exactly where you want them to go or provide visual interest to an otherwise still landscape. Some common examples of animation used today include:

- **Hover States** – items that change when you hover over them.
- **Fly-ins** – Objects appear to fly-in from the outside to the page.
- **Wipes/Dissolves** – Changing images fade in and out as content loads.
- **Parallax background** – Background images or videos that move with the scrolling of your screen

It is a good idea to make sure there is an alternate static image available for users that can't get to video or animation. This maintains a good experience for users that may have technical limitations.

Whether your animation is a small, subtle shift or big and bold, one thing to avoid is animations that become distracting. For example, if you want your visitor filling out a form, don't have objects flying around the screen and distracting them.

Animations can be built using different technologies such as CSS or JavaScript and there are many great open-source libraries that you can find with ready made examples for many of these features. There are also platforms emerging that allow you to almost eliminate coding to create basic animations.

VIDEO AND ANNIMATION

- Pond5
- Envato
- iStockphotos
- Animaker
- Animation Examples
- Elementor
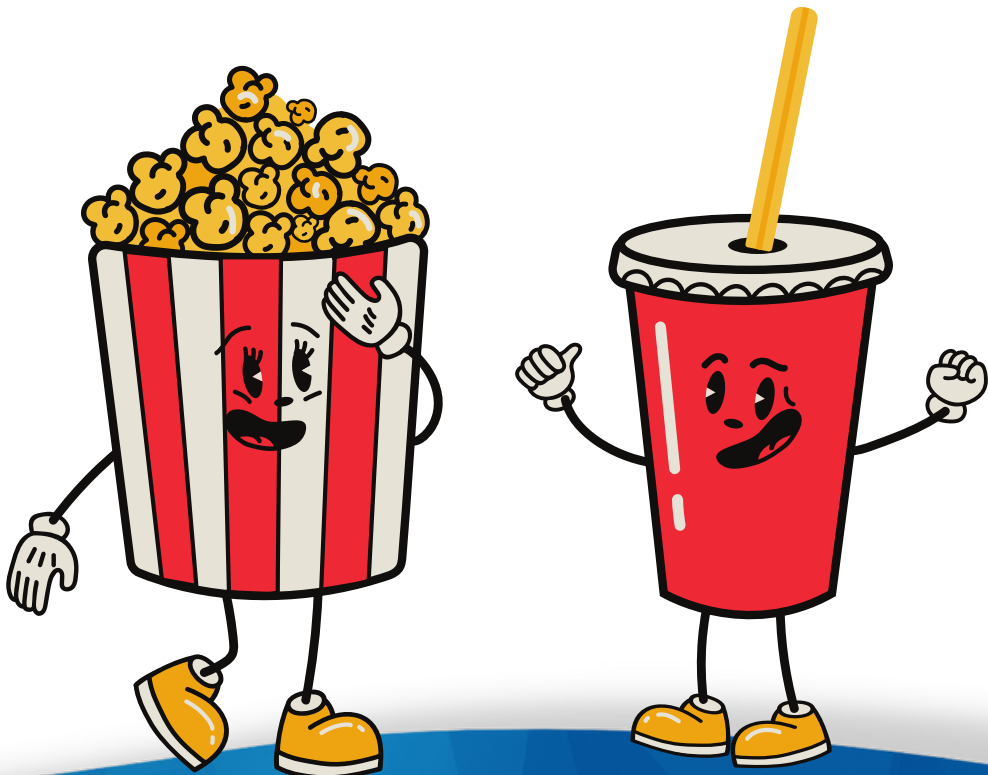
VIDEO HOSTING

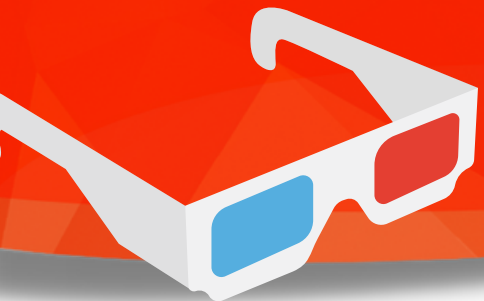Video is one of the most bandwidth intensive types of content and frequently leads the race in causing performance issues. For example, streaming 1 hour of HD quality video to your Web browser can consume over a Gigabyte of data!

The other issue we frequently see is that the type of storage and delivery needed for videos are not typically included in standard hosting plans. It is really a unique type of content when it comes to efficiently allowing visitors to watch it.

Fortunately, there are some easy things you can do to properly deploy this important content type into your websites. You want to store and serve video content from a specialized host. While there are several in the marketplace, two long term leaders in this space are YouTube and Vimeo.

One big consideration when choosing between YouTube and Vimeo is the experience you want to create. Vimeo allows you to completely "white label" the video experience so that the user does not even realize the stream is coming from a different location. YouTube on the other hand may be subject to ads or content you may not want your audience seeing. Otherwise, both offer great streaming capabilities. In particular, they will automatically adjust the video stream for different bandwidth situations and screen limitations.

VIDEO HOSTING

- YouTube
- Vimeo

Fun Fact – according to a recent study by NCTA (The Internet & Television Association), over 57% of ALL Internet traffic is video streams being consumed!

WHAT IS AN INTEGRATION?

An integration is a connection between two different software systems for the purpose of sharing information and improving your user experience. These are typically platform to platform, meaning that the two systems are "talking" to each other through a system level interface with minimal human interactions.

What can you do with an integration?

This really depends on the capabilities of the 2 systems being connected. Some integrations are very basic – like sharing account information or credentials to facilitate Single Sign On ("SSO") or they can be very complex like sharing event registration or activity data in real time. Many vendors offer robust integration libraries (called APIs) and these are becoming more standard. But integrations don't have to be complex – we strive for connections that follow this mantra: Right Data, Right Place, Right Time! This means we work to keep the integration as simple as possible while still getting the job done.

What about Middleware?

Middleware, true to its name, is software that sits between your various applications and acts like a traffic cop for your integrations. The diagram below shows our Mojo Middleware and how it can interact with various pieces of association software. Middleware can have many benefits including lower cost integrations that are faster to deploy with improved data quality.

SSO or "Single Sign On" can be a great way to get started with integrations. Customers will thank you for not having to remember an endless series of account information and your data quality will improve.

How do I get help?

Things get technical fast so this is definitely an area where hiring an expert can help. While the tools are getting better, finding someone with specific expertise in integrating different systems (like your friends here at 501Works) will go a long way to keeping your costs down and ensuring that your project goes smoothly.

APIs or "Application Programming Interfaces" are created by vendors to allow you to connect together different software packages.

MIDDLEWARE PLATFORMS

- Mojo Middleware
- Zapier
- Boomi

Community
Website (CMS)
Job Board
Single Sign On (SSO), Account Management (Mojo Web Pages)
Conference & Event Reg
Learning Management System
Email Marketing
AMS/CRM
Datamart
Data Exports
Business Intelligence

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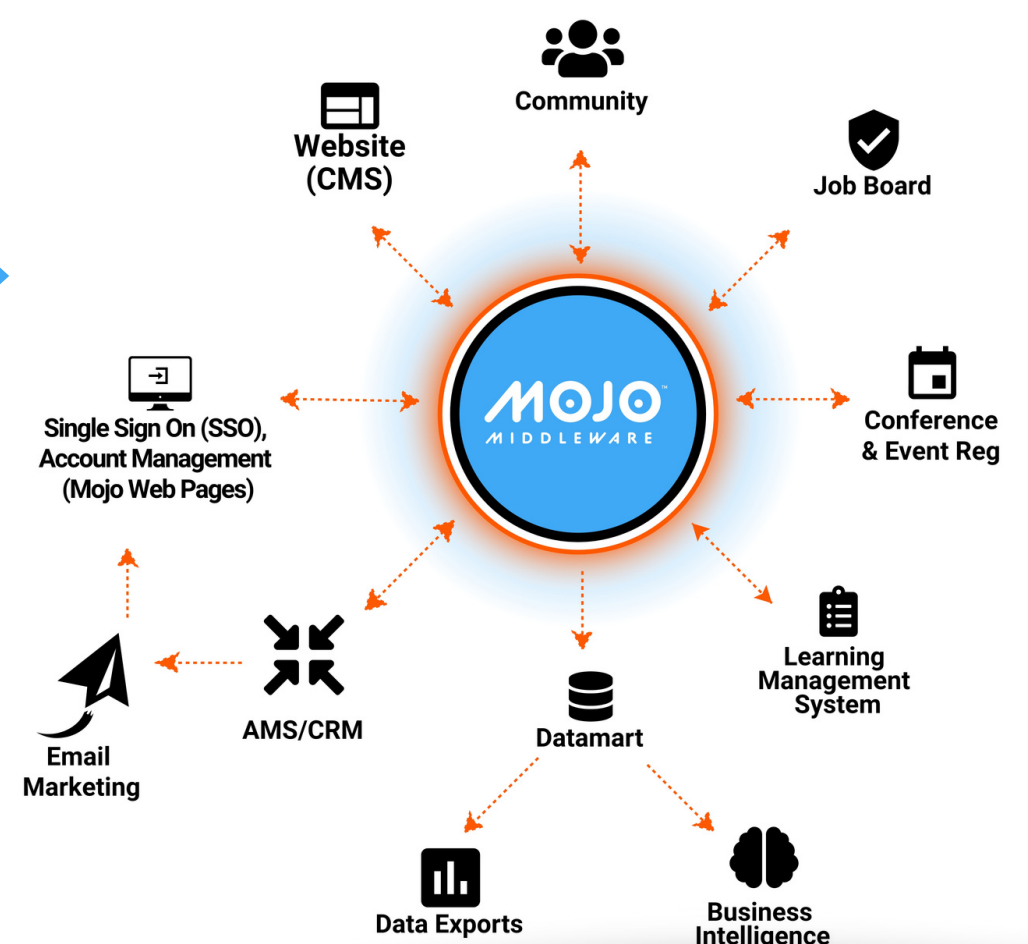
FINAL THOUGHTS

Thank you for taking the time to read **Design to Dazzle**. Hopefully you have found some good ideas you can use in your own projects. There are a lot of great resources available today if you know where to look.

We firmly believe that sharing knowledge will help our entire industry grow and thrive so please pass this along to others. If you have an idea or other great resources you would like to share please let us know.

Of course if you need some help with your project we would love to hear from you. Our contact information and services can be found below!

Happy designing!

The 501Works Team

> Don't be shy! We love talking about websites, technology, and design. If you have questions, we are here to help.

CONSULTING

501WORKS
- **IT Consulting Services –** vCIO Service
- **Advanced Web Design and Content Solutions**
- **Customized Software Solutions and Integrations**

INTEGRATION

MOJO MIDDLEWARE™

Mojo Middleware™– Easily integrate your different association software packages with over 40 available connectors.

SOFTWARE

software Mage

Software Mage™– an online tool helping you navigate the AMS/CRM selection process, gather requirements, draft your RFP, and evaluate vendor responses.

We are here to help!
Call or email us for a **30 minute free** consulting session

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