



## **Website Proposal for Boonsboro Tourism Website**

[VisitBoonsboro.com](http://VisitBoonsboro.com)

[BoonsboroMD.com](http://BoonsboroMD.com)

### **Introduction**

Boonsboro, unlike many small towns across the U.S., has many attractions – natural and man-made. There is a great deal to promote, especially with the right approach. Tourists are looking for more than just a place to visit. They want to know the back-story, see what makes it unique and feel they can take part of that with them when they leave.

**Successful tourism efforts are those that tell a story and evoke an emotion. The latest trends in tourism show that these are the most important elements to promoting tourism.**

The EDC and business owners have done a stellar job creating beautiful rack cards and other materials that promote upcoming events. Yet, one must come to town to find these materials. It is difficult for visitors to find information about Boonsboro and what to do here. The lack of a web presence for visitors sends the message that there is no reason to visit, let alone have an opportunity to tell our story, and is an impediment to fulfilling Boonsboro's economic potential.

We must grab potential visitors' attention proactively and convince them Boonsboro is a great destination with an interesting back story and historical, man-made and natural attractions.

**Skipjack Web Services will** create an online tourism presence through three primary components. Tourism efforts could easily be a full-time job, however, time and budget constraints mean that we should take careful first steps to create an online presence that can be maintained and grow.

- I. Website for Tourists**
- II. Social Media Presence for Tourists**
- III. Mass E-mails for Tourists**

## I. Website:

Skipjack will create a website that promotes Boonsboro, highlighting its unique features and telling the story of our town in an engaging, professional and friendly manner.

### Among the Features:

- Design/Layout that is clean, compelling and easy for visitors to find information.
- Attractive images of local scenery, people and spots to visit.
- Suggested itineraries based on interests to enable the user to visualize a trip they will enjoy. For example, itineraries for History Buffs, Motorcyclists, Families with Kids, Romantic Getaways, Hikers/Adventurists, Nora Fans, Foodies and more.
- Mobile-friendly and responsive so that any user, whether using a smartphone or a wide monitor on a desktop, will enjoy the experience and find what they need.
- Events Calendar to see what's coming up at a glance or plan ahead.
- Contact Form to send an inquiry by e-mail.
- Calls to Action to encourage users to learn more, sign up for emails, visit, etc.
- Sign Up Form embedded to begin to collect e-mail addresses for mass e-mails.
- News posts and slider on the homepage to feature most prominent news at the time for tourism (for example, Green Fest or Boonesborough Days).
- Google Map, links to GPS-guided Boonsboro Walking Tour app and Church Tour.
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to encourage search engines to rank Boonsboro highly when people search for tourism destinations and SEO-friendly techniques in content creation. EARNED rankings over BUYING advertising or pay-per-clicks.

**78% of potential visitors visited the destination after using a DMO website.**

**Among those who said the website influenced their decision, half reported the website was important or very important to that decision.**

*Source. DMO = Direct Marketing Organization (i.e. Tourism website)*

- Embedded social media feed showing the most recent posts.
- Shopping Page with retail shops and eateries in Boonsboro.
- Analytics account with Google to provide statistics on visitors and referrers.

**Domain:** Skipjack purchased and owns the following domains currently.

[www.visitboonsboro.com](http://www.visitboonsboro.com)

[www.boonsboromd.com](http://www.boonsboromd.com)

**Platform:**

The website will be developed on a **Word Press** platform, the most popular Content Management System (CMS) in the world, used by nearly 75 million websites. If the site contractor is changed, it will not be difficult to find a company skilled in Word Press. User account will be created for Town Manager.

**Theme:**

Word Press relies on themes to be the framework of each website. Skipjack will use a theme developed by Elegant Themes, one of the foremost developers in the industry. The theme is robust, flexible and nearly limitless. Elegant Themes has invested heavily in the theme and will be updating it for many years to come. Skipjack has paid subscription with ET, so theme updates will not present a cost to the town.

**Plugins:** The site will utilize a variety of plugins for security, backups, contact forms, and more. Each of these plugins present periodic updates.

**System Updates:** Word Press is ever-evolving to introduce new features and address security fixes. It is important to maintain the systems properly. Word Press, the theme and plugins will have regular updates that need to be made. Skipjack requires a monthly maintenance agreement to help ensure the site is protected against security weaknesses and ensure uptime.

**Security:** While no website is immune to hacking, Skipjack Web protects the site with:

- regular system updates and strong passwords
- security scans
- SSL certificate
- WordFence security plugin with firewall and notifications

**ADA Compliance:**

Accommodation techniques will be incorporated including Alt tags to identify images for screen readers, content in HTML (not solely a pdf document) and keyboard-only friendly navigation (versus mouse). Some compliance tools are not feasible due to cost. For example, providing audio descriptions of images or text captions synchronized with video images would be difficult. Other suggestions by the ADA within its compliance toolkit will be implemented.

**Customer Engagement:**

As indicated above, there will be calls to action and an embedded mass e-mail signup on the website. There will be appropriate links to Hagerstown CVB and local event information from the Herald-Mail.

**EDC Training:**

If any members of the EDC wish to receive training on how to use the website, Skipjack will gladly provide training.

## II. Social Media:

The Town of Boonsboro does its part to help spur interest in local events by posting on the town's Facebook post. The majority of these social media efforts, however, are geared for residents and do not reach more than a few miles outside of town.

Skipjack Web will lay the foundation for a social media effort that will grow its reach and influence over time. It will be important to spend most efforts on promoting user-generated content, which is relief upon far more often by potential visitors than branded content. Skipjack recommends starting with two social media platforms and planning to add as time goes on. Efforts will be made to partner for cross promotion.

### **Skipjack Web recommends starting with Facebook and Twitter.**

- Facebook – 84% of online users aged 30 to 49 are on Facebook. 72% aged 50 to 65 are on FB. 72% of users with income more than \$75K are on FB. Skipjack Web created a Visit Boonsboro Facebook account two years ago as a placeholder.
- Instagram – While 72% of teens use Instagram, 40% of 30-49 year olds also use Insta as well as 21% of 50-64 year olds. Insta has become a powerful tourism tool with geo-tagging. 48% of Insta users use it to help pick their next vacation destination

### **Other platforms to be added later:**

- Twitter – One-quarter of Twitter users are aged 30 to 49. 37% are between the ages of 18 and 29. More than half of Twitter users earn \$50,000+ in a year.
- Pinterest - The median age of a Pinterest user is 40, however, it often used to promote products such as clothing, home décor, food, etc. With half of Pinterest users earning more than \$50K a year, it is a platform we recommend adding later.

### **Skipjack recommends:**

- Starting with a goal of 3-4 social media posts per month and increasing as time/resources allow. Best to keep steady and regular.
- It will take time to build a social media presence. Popular posts will be shared and liked/commented on, thereby expanding reach.
- Social media efforts will coordinate with the website, pushing people back to the site for more information and to sign up for the email list
- Content will include the hashtag #visitboonsboro and others as appropriate.

### **III. Mass E-mails**

Utilizing a mass e-mail tool such as MailChimp, Constant Contact or Vertical Response is a PROACTIVE way to grab an audience's attention.

It will take time to build a mass e-mail list of addresses properly. The goal will be to grow a robust list that allows the town to proactively reach out to past and potential visitors to promote what is coming up in Boonsboro.

Website visitors will be prompted to opt-in to the list. Sign-ups could be placed at local businesses and town hall. A mass e-mail newsletter would feature:

- Upcoming Events – more in-time than printed materials
- Featured content section to promote some aspect of the area
- Branded appearance to match the website
- Calls to Action to push viewers toward links on content on the website
- Connect to Google Analytics to track click-through rates.

### **Project Timeline**

- July 15<sup>th</sup> – Contract Awarded
- July 22<sup>nd</sup> – Meet with EDC (if available) to get input on functionality and design
- August 28<sup>th</sup> – First draft of site to EDC at their regularly scheduled meeting
- September – 30<sup>th</sup> – changes from EDC recommendations implemented
- October – Show draft to business owners at EDC breakfast and town council for feedback. Remainder of content on site developed.
- October – Website launch mid-month
- November - Social media accounts active and first mass email sent

## Cost Considerations

Creating and maintaining a professional and engaging web presence (website, social media and email) that spurs people to visit Boonsboro requires significant effort, time, creativity, attending events and a relationship with local merchants.

A strategic tourism campaign has many moving pieces and can be incredibly expensive. For example, the current tourism campaign by the state of WV is more than \$100 million.

Boonsboro could easily use a full-time tourism manager. Since town resources are limited, however, better to start smart, lay a strong foundation and grow in the future.

### Website

- Initial Development: **\$3,900 (one-time cost, flat fee)**
- Monthly Maintenance – scheduled system updates, security scans, complete site backups: **\$50 per month (\$600 annually)**

### Social Media

- No set-up fee.

### Mass E-mail

- Set up and creation of branded template: **\$300 (one-time cost, flat fee)**

### Content Creation:

Time developing ideas for posts, working with other tourism boards on joint posts, conducting a review of other successful tourism posts.

- Creation of original content each month - **\$500 per month (\$6,000 annually)**
  - Includes developing post ideas, attending events, taking photography and professional, SEO-friendly copywriting.
  - Minimum of 2 content posts on website per month
  - Calendar updates as needed
  - 3-4 posts on social media each month
  - 1 mass e-mail/newsletter each month

### Total

First year total estimate - **\$10,500**

Second year total estimate - **\$6,600**

*Hourly Rate - \$50 for work requested by the EDC or Town in addition to that outlined above would be billed at an hourly rate.*

All work performed by Skipjack Web Services owner, Kristin Bowl, unless an additional specialist is needed due to special request by EDC.

**Important Notes:**

HOSTING - Skipjack does not offer website hosting. For security and ownership purposes, it is better to use a well-established, professional hosting provider. Also, by purchasing your own hosting account at a hosting provider, it ensures the town has complete ownership of its hosting and files. Skipjack Web will not work with GoDaddy as a hosting provider due to multiple instances of client problems with that company. While no company is 100% immune to problems, BlueHost.com is a solid hosting company, providing affordable rates, reliable hosting and great customer service. For a 5-year hosting plan, the cost should be under \$200 for the 5 years. Skipjack is not affiliated with BlueHost.com and receives nothing for recommending them.

MASS EMAIL PROVIDER - The Town of Boonsboro would likely need to sign up for a mass email provider such as Mail Chimp, Vertical Response or Constant Contact. Depending on the provider selected, the initial cost of sending emails could be free. For example, MailChimp will provide free email distribution up to 2,000 email addresses.

## **Skipjack Web Background**

Skipjack Web Services was created in response to the need for small businesses and organizations to have professionally designed websites at affordable prices with control over their own websites. The first website created by Skipjack's owner, Kristin Bowl, was in 1996, (shortly after the first public website went live) for Congressman Paul McHale.

In the 17 years since its founding, Skipjack has developed websites across many industries and for a variety of purposes.

Owner, Kristin Bowl has also worked in several public relations positions:

- Director of Communications, U.S. Rep. Paul McHale of Pennsylvania
- Press Secretary, U.S. Rep Tillie Fowler of Florida
- Director, Public Affairs, Society for Human Resource Management (300,000+ members)
- Manager, Public Relations Campaign for SHRM
- Freelance Writer, including projects for the Community Foundation of Wash. County.

**Licensure** – There is no licensure in the State of Maryland for website design or development

**Insured** – Skipjack Web Services is insured for professional liability with Hiscox Insurance/Insureon.

## **Community Service**

Skipjack Web Services and owner Kristin Bowl believes in being an active part of the community in which we are located. Skipjack has provided free or reduced-price services to many local nonprofits including:

- Children in Need of Washington County
- Boonsboro Historical Society
- South County Food Pantry and Micah's Backpack
- Trinity Lutheran Church
- Mar-Lu-Ridge Youth Camp
- Boonsboro Elementary PTA
- Gifts of Hope of Washington, DC.

Kristin Bowl has served as a volunteer for many organizations and has connections across the Boonsboro community.

## Key Clients/References

**DC Police Memorial** – a nonprofit organization devoted to the creating of a fitting memorial to honor the Wash, DC police officers who have died in the line of duty. Created website seven years ago and selected for redesign in 2019.

[www.dcpolicememorial.org](http://www.dcpolicememorial.org) Contact: Don Blake, Board Chair, [deblake2@comcast.net](mailto:deblake2@comcast.net)

**Prime Time for Women** – A social enterprise founded by Bernadette Wagner, designed to bring women together as a community in the second half of their lives. Includes a monthly live audience TV program. Created website launched in 2019 (note that client is working on gathering the content she wants to feature on the right-side of the website.)

[PrimeTime4Women.com](http://PrimeTime4Women.com) Contact: Bernadette Wagner [bernadettewagner01@gmail.com](mailto:bernadettewagner01@gmail.com)

**Security Guard Management** – A for-profit company that develops and sells training materials to security officer companies across the country. Created website nearly 10 years ago and redesigned in 2018.

[www.sgmtraining.com](http://www.sgmtraining.com) Contact: Bob Arscott [bobarscott@comcast.net](mailto:bobarscott@comcast.net)