

FoodHub in the News



Sustainable Industries Blog

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Working with mission-driven organizations

Advice for service companies working in an age of triple-bottom-line companies

Portland, OR – In today’s economy, all companies rely on their websites to reach potential clients, spread their message, earn revenue and more. Web developers, therefore, need to have a strong understanding of their clients’ business—especially if their client is a mission-driven business or a nonprofit.

Mission-driven companies or nonprofits might have very innovative ideas and projects, but often have limited resources. So how does an organization ensure it gets a solid return on investment when it undergoes a website redesign or launching a new site from scratch?

One approach

ISITE Design, a firm based in Portland, focuses on two key steps when it starts working with a new client. The first is to identify the essential innovative idea that drives the client’s business. The second is to develop a strategy for how to convey that idea on a web platform.

“Web agencies live at the center of digital innovation,” says [ISITE Design](#) President Paul Williams. ISITE Design introduces its clients to new technology options to facilitate their business goals, implementing online tools that connect the client and its potential customers in new and creative ways. ISITE Design got such an opportunity when Ecotrust came knocking on their door.

[Ecotrust](#), a Portland-based nonprofit “think tank” and “do tank,” wanted to develop an online portal that would bring together the entire Northwest food community. Ecotrust wanted FoodHub to give consumers tools to connect with sustainable, local food producers directly.

The website would include the most extensive list of food sellers available to food buyers online. Everyone from farmers, ranchers, fisherman, bakers and vinters would be able to promote their products to food buyers such as food retailers, schools and restaurants. Ecotrust approached ISITE Design to start development work on FoodHub in 2009.

After a number of development phases, [FoodHub](#) was born. It quickly gained popularity throughout the Pacific Northwest and parts of Idaho and Alaska. The vice president of food and farms at Ecotrust, Deborah Kane, led the effort for Ecotrust on FoodHub. She has since been named by *Fast Company* magazine as one of the “10 most inspiring people in sustainable food.”

Developing a plan

FoodHub came to the table with an ambitious goal, lots of ideas, but a limited budget—not to mention a diverse audience. ISITE Design helped to clear the way to focus on goals that would have immediate results and a strong impact when the website launched. Many producers in the food industry are looking for new technology to get their products to market.

ISITE Design worked with FoodHub to develop an easy and affordable membership process for new users. ISITE Design also developed sections for all of the members' needs in regards to how to best promote their crops and purchase them.

For example, there is a “marketplace” section in which members can promote what is in season, when it's available and how much they have of it to sell. Members can promote their goods through the use of blogs and emails and list in what form the food is available such as fresh, dried and canned. Also, there are advanced search capabilities allowing buyers and sellers to connect easily. This gives the member the ability to develop targeted customer databases with new buyer leads. The website also allows both direct market relationships and existing distribution channels to promote growth in regional food sales.

Return on investment

FoodHub experienced immediate interest in their new website. Shortly after launching the FoodHub had over 500 members signed up. In addition FoodHub gained national attention in the press and demand in each state continues to grow.

Businesses are constantly evolving and updating themselves, and so should their websites. As a developer, be prepared to help your client create strategies that will help their company and their brand grow—and remain sustainable—over time.

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