

Oregon Arts District Web site

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Research

In February 2008, an effort was launched to establish the new Oregon Arts District, an innovative approach to transforming this downtown area into a unique urban entertainment destination for the Dayton region. Throughout 2008, new creative spaces, such as art galleries, and new programming, such as monthly art hops dubbed First Friday, enhanced the District's existing business mix. This was part of a strategy to increase visitation to the District. Another key component of that strategy was the development and launch of a new Web site.

While researching other successful art districts nationwide, we discovered they all had informative, user-friendly Web sites. These sites provided directions, details about parking, a directory of businesses and calendar of events. We concluded the creation of such a site would drive additional traffic to the Oregon Arts District by making it easier to plan a visit. The site also would make it easier for visitors to discover the various things to do and places to go, thereby improving their overall experiences.

At the time, no Web site — let alone one with such features as a calendar of events and parking information — existed for the Oregon Arts District. Therefore, the next step was to identify similar sites to use as models. We examined the Web sites of approximately 25 arts districts nationwide and selected five that included several features we thought would be advantageous to the Oregon Arts District site. For example, we liked the home page design and site organization of Columbus' Short North site, the history page and overall navigation of Boston's Harvard Square site, and the artist profile feature of northern Kentucky's Covington Arts District site. From this research, we developed a draft site map.

Next, we sent a request for proposals to the numerous marketing, design and communications firms located in and directly adjacent to downtown Dayton. After extensive review, Hafenbrack Marketing was selected.

Planning

An integral part of the Web site development and launch planning included the creation of a new brand for the Oregon Arts District. The Oregon District Strategic Plan, completed in 2007 after extensive study of the District and surrounding areas, identified as a high priority the creation of a unique, distinctive and common brand to successfully market the District. The study noted that, while the District enjoys name recognition throughout greater Dayton, it lacks a unified brand that would better allow for collaborative marketing efforts.

We aimed to create a brand that reflected the diverse, urban and fun nature of the Oregon Arts District. Hafenbrack undertook the development of this brand as part of the Web site development. What resulted is a brand that not only met but exceeded our objectives: A "parent" logo based on a stylized "O" then modified in playful ways to represent all aspects of the District, including dining, nightlife, the arts, music, health and wellness, retail, and residential. This brand was woven throughout the design of the Oregon Arts District Web site.

At its core, the development of the Oregon Arts District brand and Web site had three objectives:

- Increase visitation to the District, particularly during monthly First Friday events
- Enhance the visitor experience
- Improve the public's perception of the Oregon Arts District

Our target audience for this project included residents in the City of Dayton, particularly in such inner-ring neighborhoods as South Park, St. Anne's Hill, McPherson Town and Dayton View; residents from the close-in suburbs; patrons already coming downtown to attend theater, sporting, and other entertainment and recreational events; and downtown residents, employees and businesses. In addition, we wanted to reach out to

those visiting Dayton for conventions and other events, as well as residents of nearby metropolitan areas, such as Cincinnati and Columbus, who may consider a visit to Dayton and the Oregon Arts District.

Our budget for this project was \$15,000: \$12,500 for design and Web development services from the marketing firm and \$2,500 in wages for the Oregon Arts District coordinator to guide the process and write copy for the site.

Execution

The Downtown Dayton Partnership oversaw all aspects of the development of the Oregon Arts District brand, and Web site and the Oregon Arts District coordinator wrote all the copy. It took approximately six weeks to develop the brand and approximately 12 weeks from the start of development to the launch of the Web site.

Throughout the process, we worked closely with Oregon Arts District businesses to ensure they were all on board with the new brand and Web site. We attended Oregon District Business Association meetings to present drafts of and gather feedback on the brand and Web design. In addition, we consulted business owners as we wrote the copy for the Web site, asking them to review the content regarding their establishments; we then worked with them to make any necessary revisions.

Once the brand was finalized, we gave District business owners a CD that included the logo art and encouraged them to use the logos in their individual advertising and marketing efforts. We also asked business owners to link their sites to the new Oregon Arts District Web site. We continue to work with business owners on these and other aspects of bringing the new brand to life, including using it in signage and District marketing materials.

We continue to drive traffic to the site in various ways. All press releases and media advisories direct people to the Web site for more information, and the Web address has been printed in numerous news articles, calendar listings and marketing materials. All e-mail correspondence includes a link to the Web site, and we have worked with partner organizations to include links from their sites to the Oregon Arts District site. Our most successful strategy for driving traffic to the site was posting a two-for-one coupon for the District's annual Halloween party, Hauntfest, on the site. Thousands of people visited the site to download a copy of the coupon.

Results

The new Oregon Arts District brand and Web site have been well-received by business owners, residents and visitors. Business owners continue to work with us to submit their events for calendar listings and news for press releases. They also report that — even in light of current economic conditions — business is holding strong. Attendance at First Friday continues to grow, as does the number of venues and organizations participating.

Anecdotal evidence shows the new Web site has improved visitors' experiences and made the Oregon Arts District a more desirable destination. For example, business owners have told us their customers use the site for parking information and directions, and they note the site was easy to use. Owners of District bed-and-breakfast establishments have reported their guests have used the site to plan their visits with great success.

Traffic to the Web site is continually growing — at a pace that's quite impressive for a new, unknown Web site. In October 2008, when data collection began, there were 141 unique visitors to the site. By January 2009, that number had grown to 1,119. Overall traffic also is on the rise, growing from 7,932 hits in October to 91,730 in January. When searching online for "Oregon Arts District," the site is now the first returned entry when using Google, whereas in October it wasn't even on the first page of Google's listed results.

In addition, this project was completed on time and within the established budget.

In 2009, we continue to bring the new brand to life and drive additional traffic to the Web site, and we believe we have an outstanding product that makes this work much easier. We are certain we're off to a great start to further increasing visitor traffic to the Oregon Arts District and improving the experience of those visitors.