CASE STUDY: YMCA

WEBSITE REDESIGN

Transforming the Digital Experience
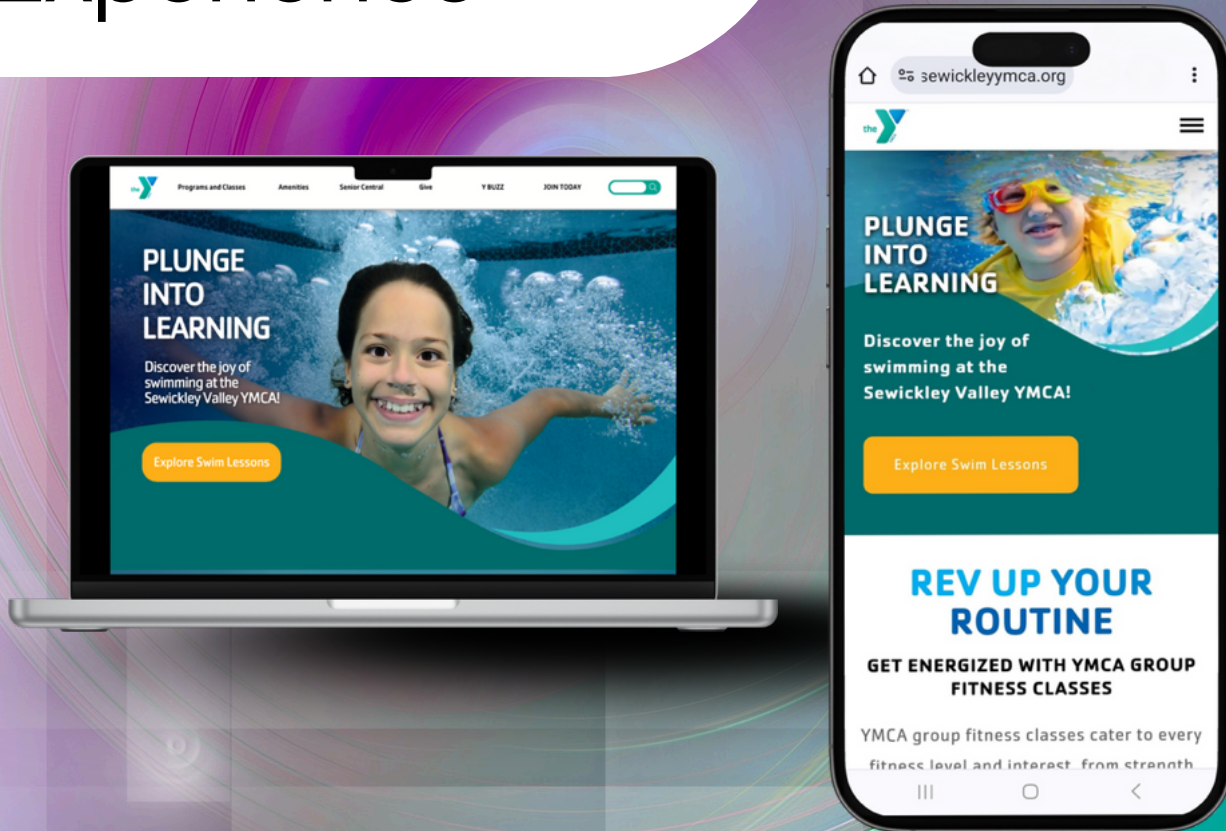
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INTRODUCTION

A mobile-friendly, modern website redesign helps local YMCA reach the community and enhance mission support.

More than six years passed since the Sewickley Valley YMCA launched its most current website. Over this period, web technology and web design best practices—as well as YMCA programs, classes, and offerings—significantly evolved. It was obvious to the organization's website content managers and users alike that the website needed an overhaul to meet current needs and expectations. To effectively highlight the YMCA's community-focused mission and impactful offerings, the organization needed an up-to-date, user-friendly—and mobile responsive—online presence.

Functionality enhancements were just the beginning. With the organization's offerings needing to feature both seasonal and evergreen content, the Y also needed a scalable and adaptable content strategy and effective use of modern design. Beyond digital and marketing best practice implementation, conveying the Y's mission and areas of impact was paramount. Change management and smart decision making across the organization would be critical to the project staying on track and resulting in successful outcomes.

As with many non-profit organizations, YMCA staff wear multiple hats, making it difficult to devote the necessary time and expertise to such an extensive website overhaul. Yet in just a few months, the Y launched an all new website that meets the needs of the community, evolves with dynamic content, and supports the YMCA's mission. Here's how they did it.

CHALLENGES

The Sewickley Valley YMCA tackled mobile design, user experience, content, and SEO head-on, creating a website that is both user-friendly and mission-aligned.

Mobile Design

With 65% of Sewickley Valley YMCA website users accessing the site from smartphones, at the top of the Sewickley Valley YMCA's requirements list was a website capable of delivering comprehensive, user-friendly, and responsive design features. The website was particularly challenging to navigate on mobile devices. This made it difficult for users and site administrators to find and manage content efficiently.

User Experience

The website, built on the Drupal platform, presented a multitude of design and usability challenges. The user experience (UX) and user interface (UI) were not as intuitive as they could be, partly due to the use of iframes to serve content from a web-based platform that the YMCA used for association management of memberships and registrations.

The integration between systems was heavily fragmented, and in turn, created a fragmented user journey. The different navigation systems and inconsistent interactions often confused users, reduced online engagement, and led to missed opportunities to promote mission-based initiatives.

CHALLENGES

Content

Mission-critical areas, such as food insecurity relief, senior adult and caregiver resources—and calls for volunteerism to help—required clear segmentation, communication, and a data structure. This would ensure that both potential beneficiaries and supporters could quickly find the information they needed and take appropriate action.

Without an integrated and cohesive view of the YMCA's benefits and diverse offerings from a user standpoint, visitors left the site with a disjointed and incomplete understanding of the organization's impact and services. A holistic approach was needed to enhance user engagement but also strengthen the organization's ability to communicate its mission, foster community support, and attract and retain members.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Content shared from the member management platform, served within iframes, was not recognized by Google as part of the YMCA website, negatively affecting search engine rankings and visibility. Performance metrics were also unclear, given search engine inability to track user interactions within iframes.

Google was also indexing 632 pages for the website. Because on Drupal, each node—such as individual event posts, news articles, or minor content blocks—had its own URL, many of which were unnecessary. As a result, search results were cluttered, and SEO value was diluted. This not only wasted the search engine's crawl budget on low-value pages but also left important pages less visible.

SOLUTIONS

Incorporating best practices in content management, function-first design, and SEO, the new Sewickley Valley YMCA website is user-friendly and mission-driven.

Content Management System (CMS)

WordPress, known for its user-friendly and mobile-responsive features, allowed for easier categorization and retrieval of content. With this first step, the Sewickley Valley YMCA's digital presence is both more accessible and manageable.

Member Management Platform Integration

The existing iframe approach made the path to complete a program or class registration disjointed and unclear. To create a seamless user journey, the YMCA employed web scraping with dynamic content integration.

With this scraping technique, content is extracted in real-time from the member management platform and displayed directly on the YMCA website. All page content is cohesively branded to maximize conversions and improve search engine rankings.

Adaptable Navigation Structure

With seasonal offerings—such as summer and fall leagues, summer camps and after-school child care—a flexible navigation structure was key. To streamline the site and enhance the user experience, well-defined content categories and a logical, flexible structure guides the navigation design. With indexing and categorization now aligned with user flows and search engine ranking best practices, important content can easily be discovered.

SOLUTIONS

Mega Menu Display

To improve user navigation and provide a comprehensive view of the YMCA's many offerings, an organized and structured mega menu was implemented. The menu opens a graphically-designed display of information by type, age group, and special interest, allowing users to see multiple categories and options at-a-glance. User experience is enhanced by reducing the number of clicks needed to find information and program categories remain visible and accessible year-round.

Audience-Centric Approach

Youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility are the YMCA areas of impact. In addition to current and prospective members browsing for programs and classes, the website serves individuals seeking community resources, from food insecurity to aging support. With a well-defined content strategy and navigation structure in place, the YMCA can present an audience-centric view of the organization's amenities, programs, and benefits.

Visual Storytelling

To highlight the YMCA's mission, areas of impact, and its history of serving the community, visual storytelling was used to build trust and connect emotionally with users. Engaging visuals illustrate the organization's long-standing commitment to community service and reinforce its values. This approach not only enhances the user experience but also strengthens the YMCA's brand identity, making it more relatable and memorable. Additionally, it provides a compelling narrative that inspires support for the YMCA's mission.

SOLUTIONS

**YMCA
Brand Harmony**

The strategic use of color, engaging visuals, and interactive elements captures the YMCA's vibrant spirit and energy. The site features high-quality photos and icons, creating a visually appealing, user-friendly experience. The creative application of brand elements consistently reinforces the YMCA's identity. The YMCA's community engagement efforts are supported by the cohesive, dynamic design approach.

SPOTLIGHT: FUNCTION-FIRST DESIGN

Design for the Needs of Your Audience

Intuitive design reflects the YMCA understands—and anticipates—community needs.

Senior Central Online

Prior to redesign, Senior Central—an endowment-funded initiative to support aging adults and caregivers—consisted of 12 disparate web pages of redundant information that was cumbersome to manage and navigate.

Using WordPress built-in functionality, Senior Central was redesigned as a robust online directory. Each resource entry is unique,

so information is easy to manage and update. Tagged by neighborhood and need, finding relevant resources is vastly improved with a 207% increase in directory users and 1.5X page views in the first 3 months.

Dedicated FAQ Page

On the new website, a page dedicated to frequently asked questions simplifies and organizes essential information. A clean, intuitive layout with categorized, hyperlinked sections makes navigation easy. Users can quickly explore a category and find answers to specific questions. ■
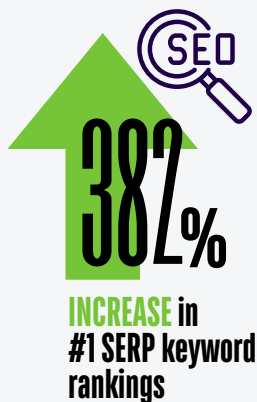
RESULTS

Restructuring the site structure, integrating the association platform, and incorporating smart keywords significantly enhanced online presence and accessibility.

Within the first 3 months, analytics reveal a remarkable performance improvement for the entire website.

Sewickley Valley YMCA core programs now appear on page 1 of search engines across desktop and mobile. Before launch, the site appeared beyond page 50.

By strategically revamping the website structure and integrating relevant keywords, the Y significantly enhanced its online presence and accessibility to the surrounding community.

SEO

382%

INCREASE in
#1 SERP keyword rankings

1ST PAGE

SEARCH ENGINE RANKING

for core programs, on desktop and mobile, from zero visibility

SENIOR CENTRAL:
a site to support the

MISSION

Endowment-funded, the vital initiative is a core area of impact.

Thanks to the comprehensive website redesign and added functionality, Senior Central, a vital resource serving seniors and caregivers, now better serves the community.

158%

INCREASE

in online directory page views

207%

INCREASE

in online directory users

TESTIMONIAL

> "The new website truly serves the Y's mission and our diverse community. Plus, it performs great, maximizing our reach. Along with a renewed sense of pride in our online presence, I gained a fantastic team of marketing and digital experts!
>
> **Amy Richardson, Director of Development and Communications, Sewickley Valley YMCA**

SPOTLIGHT: CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Guiding the YMCA Website Transformation

A thoughtful approach to change leads to a smooth and successful launch.

The process began with a thorough technical and content audit, so a clear roadmap could be developed to prioritize website updates and enhancements.

Strategy sessions gathered input and design inspirations. These discussions helped outline a wishlist, setting the stage for the design direction. This feedback helped shape the website's design and layout, meeting the diverse needs of the YMCA audience.

To drive project momentum, transparency, and understanding, explainer videos demonstrating design ideas in staging simplified concepts and technical jargon.

Dashboard-driven huddle meetings were held to review website page inventory, track page status, and outline next steps, ensuring the project remained organized and on schedule.

Prior to launch, thorough testing was performed in a staging environment. Staging mimics the production setting, allowing for an accurate assessment of performance and functionality. This led to a smooth launch while fostering team confidence within the organization.

The structured approach to change management streamlined the transition and facilitated the successful rollout of the new YMCA website, aligning technical improvements with strategic goals and stakeholder expectations. ■

ABOUT

Beth Peck in

With extensive experience in high-tech marketing and leadership, Beth offers non-profits insightful perspectives and actionable initiatives.

An expert in communications, design, and operations, she helps maximize impact through innovative, practical solutions. Driven by a passion for community and a commitment to the YMCA's mission, Beth delivers creative, results-oriented solutions aligned with organizational values.

Jason Lexell in

Jason is a successful entrepreneur, author, and trusted advisor in internet marketing and digital strategy.

With decades of experience, he provides data-driven insights and cutting-edge techniques to help non-profits excel in the always evolving digital landscape. Known for his ability to simplify complex technology concepts, Jason is a valued partner for organizations of all sizes and industries.

Inspired by the Sewickley Valley YMCA success story?

Get in touch with us.
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