



THE HENRY FORD MAKES MASSIVE ARTIFACT COLLECTION AVAILABLE ONLINE WITH PROGRESS

Client



PERFICIENT/digital

Industry: Non-profit

Product: Sitefinity CMS

Summary:

The Henry Ford leveraged Sitefinity to enable searchable, global access to digital images and videos of its vast collection of artifacts.

Integrations:

Accesso / Siriusware Ticketing
KE software's Emu Collection Management System
Google maps (Mapping)
BlackBaud (Donations)
Ooyala (Video)
Stripe (image eCommerce processing)
Exact Target (Emails)
Magento

Challenge

The Henry Ford is an internationally recognized cultural destination that brings the past forward by immersing visitors in the stories of innovation, ingenuity and resourcefulness that helped shape America. A national historic landmark with an unparalleled collection of artifacts from 300 years of American history, the U.S. institution welcomes 1.7 million guests annually, and another three million online. As such, the institution's Digital and Emerging Media team, led by Director Matt Majeski, is focused on improving the digital customer experience with its many websites, mobile apps, kiosks and floor exhibits.

"The museum maintains a collection of 26 million artifacts, and only five percent are made available to people on the museum floor," said Majeski. "Our goal is to provide access to the other 95 percent through digitization."

To that end, Majeski's team spent roughly seven years digitizing photos of artifacts in the collection and set out to consolidate data from more than 40 disparate websites and microsites that had accumulated over 15+ years into a single user experience. "We wanted to make the digital collection available globally through our website, along with inspiring stories about the artifacts."

The new website was a huge undertaking because of all it had to accomplish. For example, it needed to pull data from the multiple sources and image repositories—there were 56,000+ artifacts including images and videos, representing about 1.5 terabytes of data.

“When I first visited the Henry Ford, the enormity of the museum and its grounds was evident; however, the enormity and scale of the data that needed to be transformed and made available through the new website was magnitudes greater,” said Peter Ferraro, Solutions Architect at Percipient Digital, a digital transformation consulting firm who worked with Majeski’s team to create and deploy the new website. “Our main undertaking was to consolidate many years’ worth of website content management systems integrations, and multiple types of data repositories, to create a unified data platform.”

A key requirement for the new site was a responsive design. “About 50% of our traffic comes from mobile devices; content had to look good on various screen sizes,” said Majeski “The user experience had to be consistent from every access point. Search engine optimization was also critical for enabling fast access to desired content.”

Keeping costs down was another key consideration. “We are a non-profit organization, so we had to find a balance between capabilities and cost,” said Majeski.

Solution

Percipient Digital recommended Progress® Sitefinity® CMS to create content relationships between the new website and other systems, and to create stories around the thousands of image and video artifacts. Sitefinity was chosen over other solutions such as Sitecore and Adobe, because it offered ease of use, flexibility and unified content management capabilities. “Progress Sitefinity was the total package and delivered the capabilities and value we needed,” said Majeski.

Sitefinity enabled the team to create relationships between stories that the digital content team developed and raw data that existed in disparate systems. Additionally, consolidating search across all data sources enables people around the world to find information about the museum and its artifacts more easily.

“The Sitefinity platform’s SEO-friendly nature enables us to publish content and get it pushed out to a larger audience than we’ve ever been able to reach,” said Majeski, adding that since launching the site, he’s seen astronomical growth in the number of visitors viewing the collections. “Using Sitefinity, we were also able to introduce e-commerce, enabling people to buy high-resolution images of our artifacts, which helped to create a new revenue stream.”

“The process of pulling disparate systems into one experience is something we’re seeing more and more, as organizations ask us to help them untangle and consolidate multiple sites, to create a unified experience,” said Percipient’s Ferraro. “Sitefinity is an ideal solution for helping organizations like Henry Ford digitally transform.”

“We needed flexibility, scalability and the right price to fit our non-profit budget. Progress Sitefinity was the total package and delivered the capabilities and value we needed.”

Matt Majeski, Director, Digital and Emerging Media, The Henry Ford

Results

Since launching the new site, visits have increased 12 percent, digital collections usage is up 155 percent and referrals from social media are up more than 100 percent. “The power of the new site is enabling us to reach new audiences, who are finding and sharing our content,” said Majeski. “In addition to increased traffic and social media coverage, online revenue is up 24 percent, which is critical for sustaining our non-profit organization and enabling us to reinvest in and continue to grow our digital efforts.”

Majeski cited one new customer—a tattoo artist—who uses the site to search for ideas for tattoo sketches among The Henry Ford’s massive collections. “He has purchased high-resolution images directly from our site,” said Majeski. “Although our audience is primarily scholars, researchers and teachers, the new site is enabling us to reach new audiences we never even imagined.”

With the new platform, The Henry Ford can quickly deliver and monetize images in an automated way, producing numerous permutations for use in mobile, e-commerce and kiosk applications. “Sitefinity provides a consistent way of entering and managing content, and the ability to create custom controls for data integration,” said Ferraro. “We can implement analytics across the site, as well, enabling informed business decisions about how to optimize the user’s experience.”

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Additional benefits include improved, simplified site maintenance, enabling Majeski’s team to focus on innovation rather than being bogged down by daily maintenance tasks. “Sitefinity has completely transformed the way we maintain our digital presence,” he said. “We’re about 50 percent more efficient in maintaining our web properties.”

The next step in The Henry Ford’s digital transformation will be blending the physical museum with new digital offerings, such as additional kiosk features, geolocation and wayfinding.

“Digital transformation is about understanding how technology has changed your customer so you can change how you develop products and create experiences that drive people to buy,” said Majeski. “With Sitefinity, what we’ve created is a truly scalable foundation that will allow us to continue to transform and meet the needs of our audience—there are no technology limits.”

About The Henry Ford

The Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan is an internationally-recognized history destination that explores the American experience of innovation, resourcefulness and ingenuity that helped shape America. A national historic landmark with an unparalleled Archive of American Innovation, The Henry Ford is a force for sparking curiosity and inspiring tomorrow's innovators. More than 1.7 million visitors annually experience its five attractions: The Henry Ford Museum, Greenfield Village, The Ford Rouge Factory Tour, The Benson Ford Research Center and The Henry Ford Giant Screen Experience. A continually expanding array of content available online provides anytime, anywhere access. The Henry Ford is also home to Henry Ford Academy, a public charter high school which educates over 500 students a year on the institution's campus. In 2014, The Henry Ford premiered its first-ever national television series, The Henry Ford's Innovation Nation, showcasing present-day change-makers and The Henry Ford's artifacts and unique visitor experiences. Hosted by news correspondent and humorist, Mo Rocca, this Emmy®-winning weekly half-hour show airs Saturday mornings on CBS. For more information, please visit our website www.thehenryford.org

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