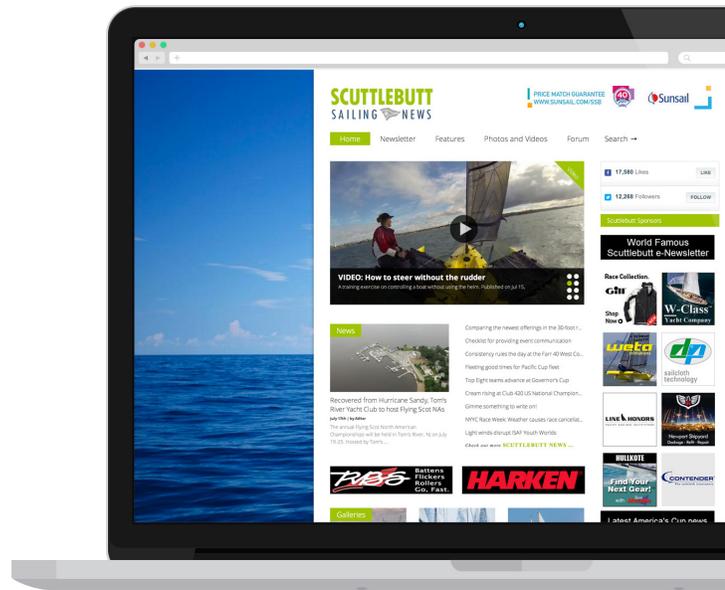digitalstyle.

A Study in Dynamic Design

Changing your website from static HTML to a dynamic design can help you leverage social media, manage your content and improve search results. In March 2013, Scuttlebutt Sailing News did just that, upgrading its website that had served primarily as a repository for newsletter content to an interactive online resource for news and images.

About Scuttlebutt

Based in San Diego, Calif., Scuttlebutt began in 1997, providing news updates to sailing aficionados in Southern California via email Monday through Friday. Since then, Scuttlebutt's target audience has grown to Northern American and international sailors. In 2003, the Scuttlebutt website was launched to archive the newsletter.

Challenge

Back in 2003, when the Scuttlebutt website was built, a static HTML site was a good option for their needs. But the last 10 years have brought major advancements in web technology and design, as well as the advent of social media, mobile computing and the power of search engines.

Before the upgrade to a dynamic WordPress platform, the majority of Scuttlebutt pages were individually built. The content of each daily newsletter resided on a single page, mimicking the format of the email. Any related content from one page to another would have had to be manually coded in a sidebar. Apart from a Facebook "like" button on the home page, none of the pages supported comments or the ability to share content via social media channels.

Photo pages were similar: photos from single events were posted on one page with no ability for the user to comment or share. The home page highlighted a Twitter feed and that day's digest of stories.

Scuttlebutt Editor and Publisher Craig Leweck wanted to upgrade the site not only to make it more user-friendly, but also to make it easier for him to manipulate content.

Scuttlebutt Sailing News
San Diego, CA
sailingscuttlebutt.com

Solution

Leweck hired Digital Style to revamp the site. The team at Digital Style conducted an analysis of the Scuttlebutt website and proposed a number of upgrades, including:

- Deploying a dynamic WordPress content management system (CMS)
- Including social media for comments and sharing
- Overhauling the information architecture, so stories could be individually posted. This would allow Leweck to highlight stories and photos both on the site and via social media, better link related content, and increase exposure of Scuttlebutt via search.
- Using a responsive approach to design the site

With a responsive design, the website will adapt to fit the screen size of each visitor's device.

Results

The upgrade has changed what was once an extension of the newsletter into a stand-alone web site that showcases sailing news and photos that visitors can share with each other. With WordPress, each news item, photo or video in the newsletter is now published as an individual post. This has several advantages:

- **Each post showcased on the home page.** Whether it's a news story or a photo, each post is placed in a dynamic slideshow on the home page. Photos were always the most popular content on Scuttlebutt; now they are front and center.
- **Related content easy to find.** Each post is categorized and tagged, ensuring related content appears seamlessly below the post.

526%
Increase in Social Referrals

- **Social media sharing.** Visitors can share each post via their social media channels. This social sharing increases Scuttlebutt's exposure beyond its direct newsletter subscriber list. After the redesign, visits to the side via social referrals increased 526 percent, growing from 7,724 visits the previous two months to 48,495 for the two months after the launch.
- **Increased interactivity.** Visitors can now comment using their Facebook login, making it more convenient for them to join a conversation, because they no longer have to create a separate username and password for Scuttlebutt.

Search engine optimization (SEO)

Each post has a descriptive title and URL, which improves search results for users who use search engines to find sailing news. An XML sitemap is also being created and submitted, which helps search engines, such as Google, index new content from the site daily. This resulted in a 10 percent increase in visits based on organic search results, and a 74 percent increase in new visits. Organic search results are keyword searches that match the content on a web site, rather than paid results.

74%
Increase in New Visits

Also notable was the 25 percent decrease in the bounce rate (single-page visits) and a 15 percent increase in visit duration, both of which tend to show that site visitors found what they were looking for.

The responsive design, which ensured the upgraded site rendered perfectly on tablets and smartphones, also had an impact: 25 percent of Scuttlebutt users are now accessing the site via mobile device (smartphone and tablet). This represents a 217 percent increase in the number of mobile users who accessed the site two months prior to launch.

Digital Style

To find our how we can help your business achieve online success, visit madebydigitalstyle.com or call (619) 940-5330. We look forward to speaking with you!

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