Rick Whittington Consulting

FIRM PROFILE

www.EconDevWebsites.com
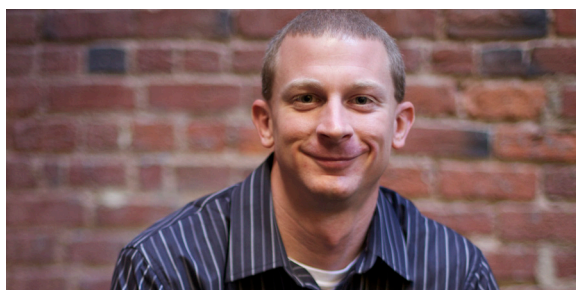www.RickWhittington.com

ABOUT THE FIRM

Rick Whittington Consulting is a website design, development and marketing strategy firm located in Richmond, Virginia. From innovative design and development to strategic online marketing, we work with companies and organizations to plan and create effective, productive websites.

Because each individual client's goals and needs are different, we listen, we research, design and build highly-functional websites to suit every situation.

Much of our work deals with economic development organizations (EDOs), and our work has been recognized by the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) and the Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC).

We strive for quality in all work that we do, and that translates to tangible, measurable results.

KEY STAFF

Rick Whittington, President

Rick has over 12 years of experience designing, building and marketing websites. He has over 5 years of Fortune 500 experience and has been responsible for creating more than 140 websites. His skills in website design, information architecture, usability and web marketing strategy have earned his company a nationwide client base.

Prior to starting the firm, Rick led web teams at Circuit City and Crutchfield Corporation. Rick has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications Studies and Marketing from Virginia Tech.

Mike Dupre, Creative Director

Mike made the transition six years ago from print design to new media and websites. In all, his 14 years of design experience for clients in diverse industries helps him tailor designs to meet the specific needs of clients.

Mike's work experience includes design for several advertising agencies and earned his Bachelors of Fine Arts degree at State University of New York at Oswego.

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

> **Website design and development**
Your website can't just be a piece of artwork. It should be strategically designed and organized to meet the informational needs of the people that will use the website. We strive to design and develop websites that tell the stories of the communities they represent. We work as your partner, understanding your business goals, your challenges and your target market, then designing a highly-functional, engaging website to meet your community's specific needs.

> **Content management**
Because you'll want to make changes in-house, we develop content management systems that match the skill levels and technical proficiencies of your staff.

> **Content development**
We help you tell your unique story with words, photos and video, then help you promote your community across social media outlets and through targeted email.

> **Usability consulting**
Analyzing your website and conducting usability testing with real web visitors helps us provide clear, actionable recommendations for improvement.

> **Mobile websites**
We've developed a coding methodology that usually allows the same website we build for the computer screen to automatically re-format itself to fit mobile screens without text becoming too tiny to read.

> **Search engine marketing**
Search engine visibility is important for economic development websites and even more critical for tourism websites. We'll optimize your website to improve your website traffic from relevant searches -- the ones that hold real value for your organization -- and manage paid search advertising on Google, Bing, LinkedIn and more.

> **Web analytics and insights**
We measure the impact of your marketing activities -- not just by providing reports -- but by telling you what key metrics mean and giving you actionable recommendations to improve website effectiveness.

OUR APPROACH

We believe that designing a website involves more than just skilled graphic design. We work as a collaborative team of design, technology and marketing professionals, each with a particular expertise, to deliver websites that connect with your prospects and effectively market your community.

Our **Strategic Approach** involves four essential steps:

1 RESEARCH & DISCOVERY

We always start by listening. We learn about your community and the marketing challenges you face. We do our own competitive research and conduct ideation sessions with our economic development consultant. This discovery process helps us devise a plan for communicating the advantages your community has to offer and what website features are needed to support it.

2 DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Working as your partner, we provide the appropriate design and technology solutions for your website to meet specific business objectives and goals. From mobile-friendly site development to customized content management systems, usability and effectiveness standards are incorporated in every design.

3 ONLINE MARKETING

We help drive traffic to your website's core features through search engine marketing and targeted email marketing. We can help write news and devise a marketing plan that includes social media and email newsletters to keep your community top-of-mind.

4 ANALYSIS & INSIGHTS

Using web analytics and research tools, we refine the tools on your website, make it more usable and adjust marketing plans to make your ad spend and your efforts more effective.

OUR EXPERIENCE

We have had the pleasure and privilege to work with several economic development organizations, as well as a range of brands and organizations in healthcare, consumer goods and services, and global business-to-business companies. A small sampling of our clients in all industries include:

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CASE STUDIES

Delivering valuable results and a return on investment for our clients is what we strive for on every project. Here is a sampling of some of the economic development and commercial real estate projects we've had the pleasure to work on, and the results that were achieved.

Client: **Greater Richmond Partnership**

Project: Website Redesign

Situation: Regional economic development group needed a new, more efficient, more easy-to-update website to generate leads and promote the region to domestic and international businesses that are expanding or relocating. It also needed to serve as an informational tool for students, relocating families and the media.

Solution: We performed an in-depth website assessment including click studies and an analysis of web analytics to identify ways to make their site more effective. This assessment allowed us to compile an exhaustive snapshot of similarly-sized economic development firms' web presences and identified their core audience segments. Interviews were conducted with members of their core audience, which enabled us to understand what content the core audience found most useful.

Having constructed a roadmap for success, we designed and re-architected the site to appeal to all audience segments.

Results: Content is managed and organized in a web-based content management system, allowing their staff to update and access the parts of the site that they are responsible for. They can also manage 3 websites from one web-based interface, and content flows to all three sites as it is published.

The new design allows for easier navigation, provides enhanced functionality and encourages site visitors to explore the region for business opportunities through photos, video testimonials from business and community leaders, data, news and publications.

The site has won several awards including Gold Cannonball for Complete Websites (highest award) in the 2009 Richmond Ad Show and awards from the Southern Economic Development Council Development (SEDC) and International Economic Development Council (IEDC). It was also selected as a feature on the Communication Arts website.

Web analytics show the site is more effective for visitors. The Average Time on Site is up 52%, Page Views is up 159% and Pages Visited is up 33%. Site Visits are up 95% and it continues to receive positive feedback.

Client: **Thomas Jefferson Partnership for Economic Development**

Project: Website Redesign

Situation: The TJPED website hadn't been updated in years, and much of the information was out of date. The website didn't effectively communicate the quality of life aspects of the region. The Partnership also was expanding its services by bringing the workforce development center and small business assistance teams in-house.

Solution: An updated, inviting homepage design was presented to orient each of three core audiences, and to show location and lifestyle aspects of the region. The new website is visually-rich and interactive. The homepage features a slideshow of business, cultural and outdoor photographs that can be easily changed by Partnership staff. An interactive map was developed for the homepage that gives the visitor more information about the counties that make up the Thomas Jefferson Partnership region. The map is fully-maintainable from the content management system.

A custom report builder was developed to allow TJPED staff to upload documents for each locality, and the public-facing report builder serves as a data hub for site locators. A custom report can be configured and downloaded in PDF format. In the content management system, TJPED staff can prepare a customized report for any county in the region.

Results: The Partnership's non-technical staff can now update almost all aspects of the website in-house using the secure, web-based content management system we installed and customized. The Partnership now updates data as it changes and adds news to the website, ensuring website content is as up-to-date as possible.

Small business support staff can publish upcoming seminars and accept payment and registration for events, enabling them to more effectively manage seminar registrations.

> " **Rick's greatest strength is his ability to listen to what a client tells him they need and translate that into a working website. He was able to achieve that with maybe 3 hours of Q&A with us. Our local partners are using the site for data downloads and prospect proposals, and the website is _the_ source for regional economic data.** "

Michael Harvey, President

Client: **The Regional Alliance for Economic Development (TN)**

Project: Website Redesign

Situation: Regional economic development organization needed a more attractive website that could be maintained in-house by a small staff. Their old website contained out-of-date information and wasn't visually-engaging.

Solution: After studying the businesses in the region, we re-architected the website, making information easy to find with as few clicks as possible. Photos were added to give a sense of place and to show the vibrant industrial activity in the area.

A section for site selectors was included to provide quick access to data, real estate, tax & incentive information and other key content.

Results: The Regional Alliance can add news items, upload photos and add/update content using a completely non-technical content management system.

Key information can be accessed in three clicks or less, and the site is better organized for the primary audiences it serves. News, information on target industries and a personal point-of-contact at the Alliance can now be found on nearly every page.

Increasing website traffic was a key goal, and web analytics shows that site traffic is up 212% since the re-launch.

" **We hired RWC because we recognized their positive work with other clients. The Alliance had a very positive experience working with RWC on the development of our website. Rick and his team were able to capture what we were seeking in terms of attractiveness and functionality of the website. They were professional and always kept us informed of the progress of the site.** "

Pin-Chia Su, Marketing Associate

Client: **Henrico County Economic Development Authority**

Project: Website Redesign

Situation: Henrico EDA needed to present compelling data for site selection consultants, showcasing the county's vibrant lifestyle and promoting its great location for companies, employees and their families. The website needed to be more appealing, exciting and user-friendly while generating viable leads.

Solution: We focused on reorganizing content and improving visitor engagement on the site through an interactive map pinpointing different business, lifestyle features and landmarks in the county. We also implemented advanced site analytics, like tracking specific user-initiated actions, to determine what companies visit the website daily and track both phone calls and e-mail prospects originating from the site.

Results: The Authority can now intelligently determine which website features are used most frequently, know specifically what companies are interested in their services and know when a phone call originates from their website. User engagement has increased by 160% and the website's bounce rate has decreased by 11%.

> **Rick Whittington Consulting was very responsive and results-driven in an aplomb manner. They put our needs first and seemed to have the right balance between technical development and creative layout. I liked it that they told us new things about the redesign process that we could actually apply.**
>
> **They were able to create a much better balance between the mounds of site selection data embedded in our website and the county's lifestyle and cultural offerings.**

Toney Hall, Director of Marketing

Client: **Thalhimer**

Project: Website Assessment & Project Discovery

Situation: Our client had not updated their website in several years and was planning a redesign. They needed a way to solicit feedback and gather functional and aesthetic input from staff in multiple locations and understand how their customers used their website.

Solution: An extensive electronic survey was distributed to key management staff in different offices. Feedback was collected and a gap analysis was performed to understand shortcomings of the current website from an internal perspective. An analysis of website analytics and usability testing followed, and quantitative and qualitative data from the target demographic/psychographic profile was collected.

Results: Gaps in content and functionality were marked for improvement, and a document was delivered containing recommendations for new content, functionality, design requirements, technical requirements and search engine optimization. This document was used as direct input for their website redesign.

> **Rick Whittington Consulting has done an excellent job bringing technical knowledge, marketing savvy, and a good business sense together in the development effort for Thalhimer's website. We continue to look to Rick for insight and recommendations for our website and e-business platform.**

Chip Dustin, Vice President, Operations

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

▶ 2011 International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Honorable Mention for Excellence in Economic Development Award in the <u>General Purpose Website category for communities with populations of 200,000 - 500,000</u> for work on the Thomas Jefferson Partnership for Economic Development website.

▶ 2010 International Economic Development Council (IEDC) Honorable Mention for Excellence in Economic Development Award in the <u>General Purpose Website category for communities with populations greater than 500,000</u> for work on the Greater Richmond Partnership website.

▶ 2010 Southern Economic Development Council (SEDC) Award for <u>Superior Websites: Local, State or Regional Economic Development Organizations, Large Division</u> for work on the Greater Richmond Partnership website.

▶ <u>Communication Arts WebPick</u> for the Greater Richmond Partnership website in October, 2010.

▶ <u>Gold Cannonball, Complete Websites</u> (highest award) in the 2009 Richmond Ad Show for work on the Greater Richmond Partnership website.

CONTACT

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