

College Pro Turns to Interactive Web Technology For Engaging Its Franchisees and Customers

By Mike Fisch, Editor

From Static to Interactive Website

A couple of years ago, College Pro decided to take advantage of the latest web technologies for engaging its franchisees and customers. Its website at the time was informational and contained static content. It wanted to take a step further and make the site more user-friendly, dynamic, interactive and better able to support the overall business.

Based in Ontario, Canada, College Pro is a student painting company that recruits and trains student franchise managers to run their own local painting businesses. It has 530 franchisees in 28 U.S. states and 7 Canadian provinces across North America.

As college students who grew up using computers and the Internet, the franchisees and painters tended to be tech-savvy and open to using new web technologies.

“In 2007, we put out a request for proposal for our website. We had four companies come in to give a pitch,” said April Broome, Controller and Director of IT at College Pro. College Pro chose to enlist ChannelNet, a company that specializes in using interactive technologies to improve channel effectiveness. “We went with ChannelNet because of their experience with micro-sites, which they had done for other customers. And they had a very good back-end platform for updating the site ourselves.”

“We are open for business and ready to go!”

- April Broome, Controller and Director of IT,
College Pro

Micro-sites and Virtual Water Cooler

Broome continued, “We redid the whole website to make it more interactive. We created micro-sites for our franchisees, and they all have separate sites that link into our corporate site.” The micro-site feature provides a four-page template that franchisees can fill out to create a dedicated website for their business. “We also made our site more user-friendly. So it has more video and pictures and a lot less static content.”

More recently, College Pro rolled out another technology that it calls the *Water Cooler*. This is a content management platform provided by ChannelNet that contains training modules, notes and other useful information for staff, franchise managers and painters. Based on access privileges, they can log in and see content appropriate for their role. Additionally, the Water Cooler has Web 2.0 features like wikis and blogs that enable franchisees to communicate with and assist each other.

Franchise managers and painters have been pleased with the improvements to College Pro’s website, especially the ease of creating micro-sites for promoting their own local businesses. For College Pro, it is now easier to distribute

information and interact with its channel.

Moreover, College Pro has continued to do well financially, even in this challenging economic environment. The web improvements have been a part of this success.

Next Up Are Customer Enhancements

As a future project, College Pro is considering how to use interactive technology to improve the customer experience. “We started conversations about what can we do for the customer, such as a customer portal or mini-site where they can get information about previous jobs or book a new job. Right now, a customer can request an estimate on the site, but that’s about it. We want it to be more dynamic, so they can do more things without having to make a phone call,” said Broome.

“And we are looking at handheld technologies, like iPhones, and how that can be incorporated for the student as well as the customer.”

As College Pro looks toward to 2010, it is optimistic and believes its website enhancements have put it in a stronger position. “We are open for business and ready to go!” she said.



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