Case Study: Green Africa Directory

CUSTOMER STORIES   WRITTEN BY HUGH LASHBROOKE

GREEN Africa Directory
Africa's sustainability directory. Networking for a greener future.

Before I became part of the ever-growing Woo team I worked at a Cape Town-based development agency called Quickonline – while I was there I worked on a number of projects that were built in WordPress as well as other systems. One such project was Green Africa Directory – a green business directory that aims to be the biggest resource of environmentally friendly businesses in Africa. It also features events, jobs and specials relating to green services and businesses.

Leveraging Listings

Because the site is primarily a directory, we decided to build it using Listings and employ the content builder to create all the other post types we needed. It turned out to be a great decision and I made extensive use of the powerful and easy to use content builder.

The first thing I did was use the content builder to enhance the existing listings post type and add in all the fields that the directory needed. In this case, there were a lot of extra requirements and the content builder could handle them all with little fuss. This included adding different image and text elements to each listing as well as adding options to feature each listing on different parts of the site.

To complement the directory side of the site, I also had to create new custom post types for Jobs, Specials and Events along with their own taxonomies and custom fields. This is a process that would normally have taken some time to build correctly, but the content builder enabled me to do it in a matter of minutes.

Setting Styles

When implementing the design of the theme I will admit I was rather short-sighted in not creating a child theme – instead, I edited the theme directly and used the custom.css file to implement all the styling changes. This makes things rather difficult when it comes to updating the theme in the future. That issue aside though, this image shows just how different the uniquely styled theme is from the default Listings styling:

Green Africa Directory, based on the Listings directory theme.

On top of the changes to the overall look and feel for the site, the sheer amount of custom fields added meant that I had to make some large modifications to how the individual listing pages were shown. One of the things I added was a custom built tabbed block to switch between different content elements and display each section quickly and easily.

I also created custom layouts for each of the new custom post types that I created using the content builder.
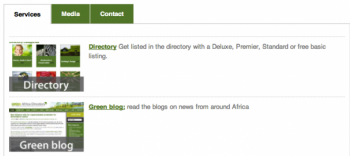
An example of the tabbed block used to display some of the listing content

Working with Widgets

As you can see from the home page screenshot, there are a number of content areas that do not come as part of the Listings theme. I created all of these content blocks as custom widgets that each display their own unique set of data. The fact that all of the site content uses custom post types made this very easy to achieve using standard WordPress queries that retrieved only the post types in question.

I also added a pay-per-click advertising system to the site using the AdRotate plugin – this was quicker than implementing a custom post type for the ads, as the plugin handles all the logic that counts the amount of clicks as well as running time for each of the ads. I modified the plugin slightly so that different ads are displayed per category as well as creating widget areas to allow the site owner to select where to display each ad.

Case Conclusions

Listings provided a large amount of the functionality that Green Africa Directory needed, but as you can see I added a lot of features that the theme does not supply by default – it did, however, provide me with the tools needed to build these extra features. Building this site really put the content builder through its paces and it definitely emerged a winner – without being able to add custom post types and custom fields so easily, the development time for this site would have lengthened considerably.

After adding all the custom features and widgets, the load time of the site became far too long – this was remedied by optimising WordPress queries and employing advanced page caching (this caching was not implemented by me and was sorted out after I made the move to Woo). In the end the site loads the large amount of content quickly and smoothly.

Feel free to browse the site and, if your business qualifies, submit your info to the directory – a basic listing is free to submit, but there are paid options as well.