Visit Flagler

Building a Top-Tier Tourism Website for Florida's Hidden Gem

Challenge

When tourists traditionally think of Florida's beaches, they are typically drawn to the vibrancy of Miami, Ft. Lauderdale or Daytona – busy cities with thriving nightlife and trendy scenes that dominate the public perception of the Sunshine State's vacation destinations. However, the community of Palm Coast and Flagler County offered an alternative to these loud and excessive locales, attracting visitors to experience their quiet, natural treasures. With an abundance of ecological beauty and miles of sleepy, unspoiled beaches, this hidden gem was already a popular respite from the busy hustle of the coastal cities – providing a scenic backdrop for eco-tourism, beachside weddings and an array of other activities.

The destination management office for Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches (Visit Flagler) had a significant challenge to overcome: how do you compete with larger, more visible destination brands in Florida while reaching the right kind of tourists within the mix – the ones seeking a quiet, relaxing trip with access to natural splendor? To start with, they knew they needed a modern, mobile responsive website that reflected this mission, one that delivered a wealth of information to potential visitors and provided access to a variety of local businesses and resources. The new online experience would serve as an extension of their integrated media promotions as well as reflect their overall brand. Most importantly, they needed an inviting design that focused on conversions for key offerings, specifically for their popular Visitor's Guide. The website also needed to be optimized for the best user experience on all sides, with modules that enabled their team to customize content quickly and easily – without coding or IT support. Ultimately, they needed to drive more of the right traffic to their website, leveraging enhanced SEO and paid marketing in a cost-effective manner.

Solution

Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches needed a web experience partner who could translate the area's unique unspoiled identity, while creating a plan to scale their outreach to potential visitors. To meet these challenges, Visit Flagler turned to Solodev to bring a comprehensive approach from design to development to SEO and SEM promotion.

In order to best incorporate the beautiful, vivid imagery of Flagler County and its beaches, the county relied on Solodev to design a responsive website that autoscaled the content – regardless of the device. Visit Flagler wanted a user-friendly way to help its thousands of visitors make use of the county's extensive database of things to do, places to stay, and restaurants to savor. Solodev ensured the user experience was enjoyable on both the front and back ends, so anyone who interacted with the website felt empowered. For those contributing to and updating the site, this meant having an easy platform from which to add information and resources for website visitors. Solodev also delivered an easy-to-use calendar that consolidated events throughout the community into one location, all manageable without coding of any kind. The platform also integrated with the county's beach camera so visitors could check surf conditions before hitting the waves, as well as an extensive lodging search through Jack Rabbit.

Visit Flagler also needed an easy way to manage its popular e-newsletter. Solodev crafted a solution that integrated Visit Flagler's use of Equest Systems into the website and developed a smart, simple form submission system.

Visit Flagler also leveraged Solodev's in-house digital marketing agency, DigitalUS, to help optimize their SEO and elevate their SEM. Keeping the project within one company and agency also saved Flagler money by leveraging the efficiencies of a one-stop relationship and its integrated capabilities. Solodev's platform ensured that SEO would be integrated from the ground up and architected a broader digital strategy that made the most out of every keyword. The Solodev/DigitalUS team also planned and executed a successful PPC and retargeting campaign that drove qualified traffic to the website.

Visit Flagler also leveraged the partnership between Solodev and Amazon Web Services in order to tap the extensive benefits offered by AWS Cloud hosting. Visit Flagler's website needed to be able to quickly respond to spikes in website visitors, so they used the power of the *AWS Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2)* to auto-scale capacity up adn down as those requirements changed. By leveraging *AWS CloudFront*, the Visit Flagler website can accommodate 100,000 concurrent users. In order to best juggle the load of a variety of integrations and custom applications, Visit Flagler used *AWS OpsWorks* to scale their website based on time or load and to orchestrate changes to meet their technological environment changes. Thanks to its cloud hosting environment with AWS, Flagler's website is prepared for full disaster recovery.

Results

The responsive VisitFlagler.com website now serves as a focal point for visitors to find vital information and resources to plan their trip. **By employing the SEO practices, VisitFlagler.com had a 61% jump in organic visits between the old website and the new. PPC campaign conversions also saw a nearly 30% increase, and Adroll retargeting campaigns saw a whopping 79% conversion boost.** Thanks to that traffic, more visitors can learn about the area through additional promotional resources like vacation and wedding planning guides. More people are coming to the website now than ever before, and they're discovering the unique and untouched beauty of Palm Coast and the Flagler Beaches through an immersive digital experience that reflects the one they'll have on their peaceful shores.

About Solodev

Solodev is a premier Web Experience Company and the world's first web enterprise Web Content Management System (WCMS) built for the AWS Cloud. The AWS Cloud remains the most secure, redundant and extensible infrastructure on the planet. With Solodev, organizations of all sizes can build amazing websites, custom applications and engaging digital strategies that transform the customer experience. Leading brands like the Florida Department of Education and OneBlood rely on the Solodev Web Experience Platform to create without compromise and build unique digital experiences across any device with unparalleled control and 24/7/365 U.S.-based support. Solodev's SaaS solution is available for purchase in the AWS Marketplace or at solodev.com.