

RedLeaf brought new simplicity and cost-efficiency to an e-commerce website burdened with complexity, redundancy and high costs.

Living on the Edge is an international radio, television and Internet ministry led by founder Chip Ingram and based in Atlanta, Georgia. Each week an audience of more than 800,000 people view and listen to its broadcasts on over 800 outlets. In addition, in 2007 1.1 million people tuned in via the Internet. More than 1.6 million of its podcasts were downloaded. To finance its outreach, Living on the Edge also publishes resources that include books, DVDs, CDs and tapes, all of which are sold on its website.

As successful as Living on the Edge's expansion into the online world was, it was coming at a high price. The increasing number of people accessing the organization's e-commerce site was steadily driving up costs, challenging the IT team to find ways to improve the site's efficiency and productivity.

Monthly costs from a third-party e-commerce provider were high. Redundant sets of records were being produced for each transaction, and valuable time was being spent constantly cleaning up the records. What's more, the user experience was cumbersome.

Complexities to overcome

For example, the process for ordering tangible goods like a book or CD was different from that for downloading an MP3 or video. Anyone wanting to supplement an order with a donation had go to a different section of the site to accomplish that. And the value of any premiums that donors selected had to be deducted from the amount of the donation, per IRS regulations.

The service provider for Living on the Edge's e-commerce site said it would be difficult to streamline these and other functions due largely to the diverse set of software and service providers tied into the back end. But the organization's managers didn't accept that claim.

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“We knew that though the development task might be complex, it was possible to create an easier, more user-friendly and less costly website,” says Greg Kucala, president of Living on the Edge. “The problem was that we didn't have time to develop and integrate the software on our

own. So we got in touch with RedLeaf Software to create and deploy the programming we needed.”

Starting anew - and fast

Flawless integration a must

Living on the Edge's challenge to RedLeaf came at a critical time. Having recently been launched from another ministry, Living on the Edge not only needed a simpler and yet more functional e-commerce platform but also it needed it very quickly.

“We only had a few weeks to get the new site up and running,” says Stirling Flynn, director of technology. “But RedLeaf proved to be a very fast study and also very responsive to our requests.”

One of the biggest challenges was the scope and size of the integration that was needed, as evidenced by the voluminous data base schema needed to be written to support Living on the Edge's customer relationship management software alone. On top of that, the new system had to flawlessly link with address verification software and systems used by the organization's merchants.

The end result was simplicity. Users can click on the site, order any mix of items and downloads, and, at check-out, be invited to add a donation to the transaction and select a premium. They can even arrange for automatically recurring donations. The whole process is very easy and intuitive.

Top-notch responsiveness

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During both development and deployment of the new system, Flynn says RedLeaf was always quick to respond to inquiries. “It seemed like they were online 23 hours out of 24,” according to Flynn. “We'd often get a question answered in minutes, and an issue resolved within hours.” This was key because while RedLeaf was programming the back end of the system, Flynn was guiding Living on the Edge in designing the front end so that both would be ready to launch at the same time.

Flynn also praises RedLeaf for its ability to meet fast-breaking interim deadlines during the project - and to point out if those deadlines threatened the integrity of the final product.

“RedLeaf's constant focus on the end result was extremely valuable to us,” recalls Flynn. “It wasn't just a matter of writing code. We appreciated it when RedLeaf would push back a bit on a deadline because they had the expertise to understand the ultimate impact on the system's functionality. And we also knew how hard they were working to meet their commitments.”

80 percent lower costs

With its new, streamlined e-commerce site up and running, Living on the Edge estimates that costs have dropped to 20 percent of previous levels. And Living on the Edge has an e-commerce site set up to support the growth in its worldwide audience.

“We're now starting to plan a fresh round of enhancements to the site and database,” says Flynn. “When it's time to implement those we'll definitely be calling RedLeaf.”