

etrends | new website touts efforts of wind farm group

By Pamela J. Willits

Brian Sooy, the president of a Elyria-based design and marketing firm that works exclusively with nonprofits, responds with philanthropic philosophy when asked what inspired him to expand into the nonprofit sector.

“Moving from success to significance,” he says. “It’s about what’s going to be our company’s legacy.”

The expertise provided by Sooy’s firm, Aespire, helps nonprofits, foundations, colleges, and universities advance meaningful causes through engaging stakeholders and fundraising.

In developing new websites, as Aespire recently did for the Lake Erie Energy Development Corp. (LEEDCo), the strategic phase addresses the organization’s mission, who the audience will be, and how to position donors and stakeholders. “Foundations want to know how their funds are being used,” Sooy says.

Sooy, the former president and current development chair of nonprofit food bank Second Harvest, prefers working with open-source content management systems, such as Joomla. “It’s a great value for nonprofits, as they don’t have to pay licensing fees for the software,” he says.

Plug-ins and embedded widgets for fundraising, such as the donation widget by Razoo, also have advantages. “Donors are more likely to donate if it keeps them on the site instead of being kicked to PayPal,” Sooy says.

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Lorry Wagner, the president of LEEDCo, says his organization was drawn to Aespire because of its experience with nonprofits and technology firms. During the planning stages it simply asked Sooy what he had done in the past that had worked. They relied on his expertise in terms of the site’s look, feel, and functionality.

“LEEDCo is a single-purpose entity with the goal of building offshore wind farms,” Wagner says. “People have preconceived notions about wind energy, and some of those ideas are incorrect, so we decided we had to be more of a resource site for accurate information.”

Being able to manage its own content once the website was up and running was another big draw, as Wagner sees LEEDCo’s website changing as the organization evolves. Originally built for the layperson, it is designed for those seeking general knowledge.

“Going forward, we’ll need to be more than that, so the ability to easily add pages, tabs, and other features was important to us,” Wagner says.

Incorporating a lightbox widget, with its pop-up interface, into LEEDCo’s recent “media mentions” column on its home page allows visitors to view media content without ever having to leave the site. And that news content adds to the project’s overall credibility.

While the shale gas boom has captured everyone’s attention, the answer to future energy needs — to paraphrase songwriter Bob Dylan — may be blowing in the wind, Wagner says. “It’s the most benign form of energy. Environmentally speaking, tourists and boaters love it,” he says.

With a \$4 million federal research grant in hand, LEEDCo. plans to develop a wind energy industry off the shores of Lake Erie. Northeast Ohio hopes to cash in on that natural resource, given the number of new jobs it could blow our way.

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