


Local

Search-optimized website launches

 By Austin Ramsey Messenger-Inquirer

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As part of effort officials say is geared toward staying relevant in a constantly evolving digital age, the Owensboro-based Green River Area Development District has launched a new website this year and is ramping up online interaction via social media.

GRADD, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, plans to use its new website to remain engaged with a variety of clients that may range from an elderly person needing transport to doctor's appointments or a local city official seeking grant money for roads.

"The main philosophy behind this redesign was how to keep people's attention with a modern look," said GRADD Executive Director Jiten Shah. "Everything is so focused on marketing and social media these days that we knew we needed to provide quick access to the information you're looking for. In the past, you had to understand what department you were looking for and navigate through multiple different pages. We wanted to make it more customer-friendly, so we emphasized a search function; let us do the searching for you and show you exactly what you're looking for."

GRADD is a regional planning agency responsible for providing several counties in western Kentucky with a multitude of different services. The district office is home to business loans, transportation planning, regional transportation services, social services and more. It's a lot of information in one place, Shah said, which makes relevancy all the more key.

"We're trying to be responsive to the general population, and for us, that includes elected officials, the private sector the public sector, nonprofits and everything in between," he said. "It's hard to say competitive in a social market. ... For a long time, I think we rode that brand, because if you asked anyone about GRADD, they knew that name; they had heard it. Now the question is whether they will stay with us. We're in the process of reinventing ourselves right now."

As clients change, the district office must, too. Kim Wells is the communications manager at GRADD, and she said part of the reinvention process involves social media.

It's not been a focus for GRADD, but she said staff are beginning to realize how critical it can be in helping communicate with broad audiences on their own terms.

"We have to adjust all the time," she said. "But social media is where it's at right now, and we want to be there so that we can meet the demands that exist in our region."

The website is gradd.com.

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