



Case Study: LocalConnect.com

THE CHALLENGE

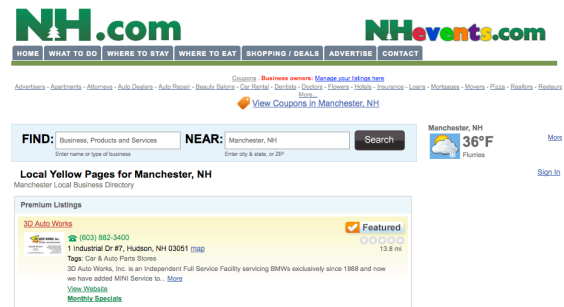
Come search our site to find a restaurant tonight. For many regional media publishers, such as newspapers, this functionality became a true opportunity.

With New Media publishers Such as Yahoo™ and Yelp™ providing enhanced local business listings to their users, regional media publishers found themselves in a struggle to grow their online audience share by enhance profile data on the business customers they already had relationships with. But to many regional publishers the build vs. buy situation was all too familiar. Building their own local search functionality was surely a great way to increase overall organizational value, but when compared against the competitive market pressures and speed at which Internet search algorithms were being developed, internal development did not provide a very competitive solution. Partnering with a major local search provider such as Google™ was a secondary option that achieved the goto market strategy at a more timely pace, but when weighing the risk of cannibalizing their own advertiser base, the option seemed pointless.

Regional media publishers needed a branded local search solution for their large user communities.

THE SOLUTION

Discovering the opportunity to provide regional media publishers with a branded local search solution, and presenting the business case to the Local.com™ executive team was the first step for Visionary View™ principal Greg Bozigian.



Providing a simple User Interface was key to achieving high adoption rates of major regional media publishers enabling internal non-technical staff to build the desired user experience.

The Platform

Having just launched a successfully growing local search engine built on a completely modular platform, the next logical product feature development was to open the platform in a secure way allowing other publishers to pull results set data and display it on their own site. Utilizing a series of Application Programming Interface (API) calls based on Simple Object Access Protocol (SOAP) protocol

KEY PARTNER “POWERED BY” RESULTS

Local Search for BDLocal.com

Local search-ivantage.com and shoptropolis.com

Local search domain syndication network 60,000 sites

Local business directories -Morris Publishing Group

Athens Banner-Herald (www.onlineathens.com)

St. Augustine Record (www.staugustine.com)



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and Extensible Markup Language (XML) feeds, Local.com's Local Direct™ platform had the ability to parse inbound partner data sources as well as deliver relevant local search results to publisher partners. Acting as a true data interchange met the data aggregation challenge many regional media publishers faced and provided a single platform based solution.

The User Interface

True scalability could only be achieved through an intuitive and intelligent user interface (UI). The product requirements needed to be robust enough to translate into a product design specification that allowed for secure publisher access with enough creative branding ability to relevantly extend the brand's look and feel. In product managing the development of the UI, a modular approach was taken with the search query widgets, the results sets, and the individual business profile pages.

1. Full HTML control
2. Editable Page elements
3. Algorithmic results sorting

Allowing full Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) control over page elements such as the header, footer, right and left page rails provided publishers with the ability to completely brand all user interaction points with a unified experience. Customizable page level elements accessible by non-technical staff via a secure Internet based platform included images, color palette selections, Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

themes, and on/off (no rails vs. rails) to fully match the experience.

A simple sub domain-masking feature was also available for custom domain level setup and maximum Search Engine Optimization (SEO) benefit.

Including a revenue model for the publisher, data partner and Local.com™ was also key. Ensuring that an increase in traffic would provide the best possible revenue ability meant another key feature would include publisher level control of local search results UI display with a maximum click conversion in mind. In the product requirements phase, we carefully detailed publisher UI capability using the latest asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX) development techniques allowing simple drag and drop capabilities to arrange the display of sponsored and non sponsored business listings. This vital product functionality became an overwhelming value proposition, as regional media publishers were able to directly sell paid placement of directory listings and display such priority ranking in front of prospective online consumers accordingly.

THE RESULTS

In march 2005; initial partnership adoption began with the Local Direct™ search and advertising platform powering Internet Yellow Pages (IYP) provider, Business Directory Local™, (BDLocal.com). This partnership provided enhanced local-search functionality to BDLocal.com including the ability for consumers to conduct natural language local searches.



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Quick to follow in April 2005, Local Direct™ powered a comprehensive network of over 2,000 city-based search and directory sites for online city guide provider, the ivantage™ including their network of sites such as search giant shoptropolis™.

In June 2005, Local Direct™ powered eight newspapers owned by Morris Publishing Group™, a subsidiary of Morris Communications Company, LLC™ including the Athens Banner-Herald™ (onlineathens.com), The St. Augustine Record™ (staugustine.com), The Peninsula Clarion™ (peninsulaclarion.com), and the Amarillo (Texas) Globe-News™.

In November 2005, Local Direct™ powered local-search for two of Freedom Orange County Information's™ (FOCI) online properties, The Orange County Register™ (ocregister.com) and The Squeeze OC™ (squeezeoc.com).

In March 2006 after notable partnership success Local Direct™ was rebranded as LocalConnect Local Direct™, a private label local search engine for regional web sites and publishers to provide local search on their site web sites. LocalConnect™ offered publishers a simple three-step process to customize and build a powerful local search engine for their site within days. LocalConnect™ also represented added revenue opportunities for web sites by allowing them to integrate and enhance their own advertiser listings with local and national sponsored listings from Interchange's large network of advertisers.

About Visionary View

As performance product managers, we believe New Media provides an organization with an opportunity to develop applications that enhance people lives. We aren't one resource trying to do it all, but an entire team of world-class strategists, product developers, product managers, designers, and project managers.

Our mission is to help pioneering Internet and New Media organizations better fulfill their missions through improving user experience and expanding their audience reach. Visit us at: www.visionaryview.com
