

Supply Chain Edge Website: Turning a Website Inside-Out

Having determined that its website did not adequately support the firm's business development efforts, this growing supply chain consultancy asked Alterra Group for help. Working together, we turned the site inside-out, replacing a "firm-out" perspective with one that was "client-in." In so doing, we transformed the site into a highly engaging business development channel that enabled meaningful discussions with qualified prospects.

Business Challenge

Like any professional services firm, Supply Chain Edge (SCE) relies on its website to support its business development efforts by showcasing the firm's capabilities, providing evidence of its expertise, and demonstrating how the firm helps solve clients' problems. This support was especially critical to the firm as it shifted its market positioning from a narrowly-focused trucking and transportation consultancy to a firm that provides a broader range of supply chain consulting services. Indeed, as a small firm encountering a whole new set of competitors, SCE found it imperative to have a robust website that effectively communicated the value the firm generates for clients.

However, SCE's website was not playing this important role. The site was created several years ago and reflected the firm's outdated market positioning. In addition, the dated site was in need of a facelift—both technologically and graphically. Consequently, the firm's business development professionals were hesitant to send their prospects to the site for more information on the firm—which created a significant gap in the relationship-building process. Furthermore, because the site had no analytical tools, SCE's management did not have access to statistics on how often the site was being visited, which content was most interesting to visitors, and which visitors were most interested in doing business with the firm.

"We really knew it was time to look at improving our online presence," noted Joe Brady, senior partner at SCE. "It

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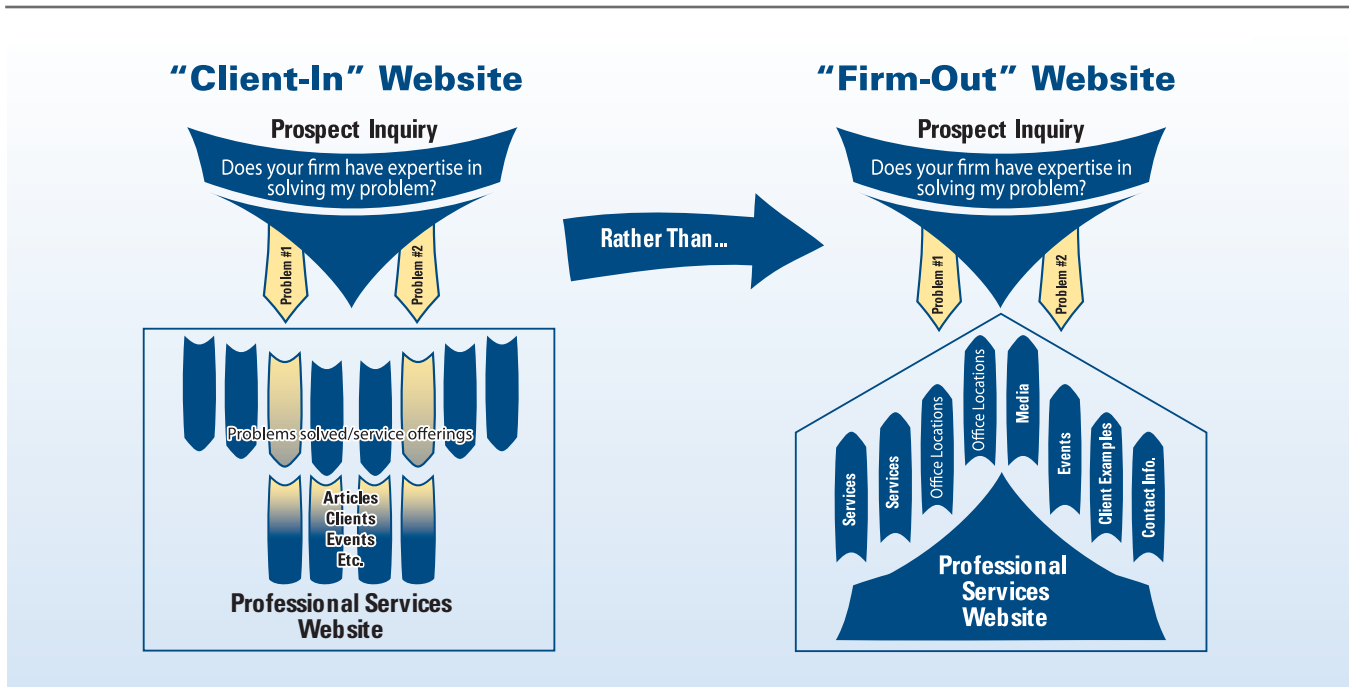
served us well in the early days, but it clearly was time for a more robust site that was a help, not a hindrance, in our business development efforts."

Facing these challenges, SCE asked Alterra Group to conduct a complete evaluation of its website to determine how the site could be improved to play a more valuable role in the firm's business development efforts.

How We Helped

Alterra Group brought to the SCE project its insights gained from years of research and experience in developing professional services websites. One of the most important of these insights is that professional services websites should be organized around clients' key business problems, not around how the firm does business. In fact, Alterra Group research has found most professional firms' websites are built from a "Firm-Out" perspective, where internal language and concepts drive outward-facing communications: Their home page promotes sections devoted to office locations, members of the management team, media, white papers, and so on. The result is that many prospects with an immediate need leave the site after failing to quickly determine whether the firm could solve their problem. The more effective approach, we've found, is the "Client-In" perspective, where external ideas and issues are reflected in the firm's materials, enabling clients to quickly "see" themselves and their challenges and, thus, more easily connect with what the firm is saying. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
How Professional Services Websites Should Be Organized



Our initial review of SCE’s website found this common shortcoming was one of several that was keeping SCE’s website from living up to its potential. Thus, we set out to perform a more thorough analysis to identify other ways in which the site could be improved. To do so, we evaluated SCE’s website along four key dimensions: organization and information architecture, technical underpinning, content, and graphic identity and design. Our partner in this analysis was The Legato Group, a website design firm with which we had worked on similar engagements.

In terms of organization and information architecture, we confirmed that while the information architecture of SCE’s existing site was very simple and clean, the site largely followed the “Firm-Out” model instead of the preferred “Client-In” approach. For example, nowhere on the landing page could a prospect see the problems SCE solved and, thus, easily determine that the firm could address its challenges. Instead, the site “pushed” information on SCE to visitors organized around the way SCE saw the world. In addition, the firm’s thought leadership material—white papers, case studies, and articles—was not readily accessible to visitors. As these are the primary vehicles through which visitors “sample” SCE’s expertise, they needed to be much more prominently displayed to play a more effective role in business development.

Our technical assessment of Supply Chain Edge’s website didn’t find much “wrong” with the site. However, we did identify several changes that would make the site more efficient, faster and easier to maintain, including providing

HTML instructions to browsers, using more current technology to reduce load times, and updating the content management system to simplify maintenance.

While the architectural and technological aspects of a website are important—after all, without them, there would be no site—the true value of a website comes from the content conveyed. Our analysis found the content on SCE’s website lacking overall. Most critically, there was limited content on the site that would enable visitors to “sample” SCE’s expertise and see how that expertise had been put to work for organizations facing similar challenges—in other words, white papers, byline articles, presentations, case studies and other such thought leadership material.

Finally, in evaluating the design aspects of SCE’s website, we found that it was clean and, importantly, consistent with the firm’s printed materials. However, from a visual perspective, the site was not as sophisticated or as contemporary as it should have been given the type of services SCE provided and the level of executives with whom the firm wanted to engage (senior supply chain professionals). Indeed, there was substantial opportunity to come up with a fresh look and feel that would be at once clean and attractive as well as elegant and sophisticated.

In sum, we concluded that the shortcomings of SCE’s current website would, over time, impede the firm’s ability to build its pipeline and establish and maintain a more sophisticated market position.

Given this conclusion, and the technological issues with the site, we recommended SCE build an entirely new web-

site. We proposed that the site should feature a new technical architecture that would make it easier to load, organize and maintain; new content that would more effectively communicate SCE's expertise, services and value to its clients; and an integrated and updated graphic identity that would make the site more visually appealing and contemporary. To make this vision a reality, we took a three-step approach that encompassed creating a new information architecture and content that would support a "Client-In" perspective, developing an updated visual design, and finally putting the technology in place to make the new site functional.

Information Architecture

The process of creating a new information architecture began with a series of discussions with SCE professionals to determine the major supply chain problems the firm solves for its clients. These problems would form the anchor of the "Client-In" perspective of the new architecture and subsequently drive the remainder of the site's navigation. In the end, we settled on six major problems the firm solves:

- > Reducing supply chain costs, improving operations, and generating year-over-year productivity gains
- > Measuring and monitoring supply chain performance
- > Selecting and implementing logistics technology
- > Restructuring operations
- > Managing supply chain risk
- > Determining which supply chain processes to outsource when and how

Once these client problems were identified, we worked with SCE executives to determine which of the firm's existing services helped solve which problem. In doing so, we not only ended up with a succinct list of services to promote on the site, but also provided an important contextual bridge between the content on the "Problems We Solve" and "Services" tabs. In essence, the initial exercise in creating the information architecture was a market positioning effort, as it required SCE executives to narrow the scope of the firm's offerings and develop a more focused message to take to clients.

"This was the most critical part of the website development process," said Brady. "We really benefited from the way Alterra Group pushed us to focus on the most important things we do. It helped to make our market messages more crisp and our value proposition clearer."

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Rounding out the information architecture were new pages dedicated to housing SCE's thought leadership materials and client case studies, as well as sections that provided information on the firm and its management team, SCE news and contact details. Importantly, the architecture provided for the creation of relevant links among sections—for instance, between a specific service offering description and a case study illustrating how that service was delivered in a particular client setting, or between the bio of an SCE partner and a white paper he had written. Such links further help visitors navigate through the site and understand how SCE's expertise can help clients.

After confirming SCE approval of the new information architecture, Alterra Group worked with SCE staff to write new copy for the site that more clearly communicated the firm's new market positioning and value to clients.

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Graphic Design

Once the new information architecture was developed, we engaged our graphic design partner to create a new look and feel for the site that was consistent with the new corporate graphic identity we had previously developed for SCE—a theme that was modern, clean, simple, and engaging, and that reinforced SCE's desired brand image and positioning in the marketplace. This new graphic identity included three visually different but related designs for the site's primary, secondary and tertiary pages to give visitors visual cues about their place in the site as they navigated through it. Our team also incorporated graphic elements to help bring the site to life and break up copy blocks.

Technology

To create the technical underpinnings of the new site, we once again engaged The Legato Group. Our key objective was to use technologies that would enable the site to be easily maintained and operated by SCE. Thus, The Legato Group programmed the new site using style sheets, which promoted a clean look, easy maintenance, intuitive and powerful navigation, and enhanced ability of search engines to find the site and rank it higher in search results. Our combined team also set up an easy-to-use content management system to allow SCE to continually keep the site fresh and relevant to prospects. In addition, we helped SCE establish a secured intranet to enable the firm's geographically dispersed business development team and consultants to easily and safely access and share proposals, presentations,

contracts, templates, and other key documents. Finally, to keep the site fresh and interactive, we built a survey on key supply chain challenges for visitors to take. This tool enables SCE to both engage visitors and begin conversations with prospects on challenges they have and ways SCE could help.

Results

Supply Chain Edge's new site has generated a number of benefits for the business. Management now is able to update the site more quickly and cost-effectively, they have access to regular website reporting to measure the impact of their promotional efforts, and their site is more easily scalable to accommodate the firm's anticipated growth. The firm also

has gained a channel for sharing in-depth case studies and points of view that demonstrate their expertise on key supply chain topics.

Most importantly, the new website now fulfills its role as an extension of the business development team: It engages prospects in conversations about their top supply chain challenges and the ways in which SCE can help. "We're really happy with how our new site turned out," said Brady. "It's clean, easy to navigate and accurately portrays what we do and how our clients can benefit from working with us. It's definitely going to be a big help in supporting our expansion as a full-service supply chain consulting firm." ▲



Alterra Group helps professional services organizations raise awareness of and create demand for their services among key target audiences. We do this via three principal services: developing unique points of view, articulating those points of view in a variety of publications, and building powerful marketing campaigns around the content in those publications to get points of view in the hands of current and prospective clients. We have applied our approach to thought leadership marketing in a diverse group of professional services firms, including leading global outsourcing and systems integration companies, influential trade associations, midsize consulting and strategic advisory firms, boutique consultancies, and independent consultants and authors.

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