

MARCH 2009

Restaurant Business

STREET SMARTS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR

THE SECRETS BEHIND GREAT WEB SITES

There are reasons some
restaurant sites win awards
and rack up traffic

RULE #1: IT'S ABOUT
THE BRAND.
RULE #2: IT'S ABOUT
THE BRAND.

THEY TELL YOU—WITH THE
DESIGN, THE PHOTOS, THE
CONTENT, EVERYTHING—WHAT
MAKES THEM UNIQUE.

THEY ORGANIZE
INFORMATION—THEN
ORGANIZE IT AGAIN.

THEY DON'T GO BROKE
ON A DESIGN, BUT
THEY SPEND MONEY ON
THE RIGHT THINGS.

AND DOES IT REALLY
HAVE TO BE SAID?
THEY KEEP IT UPDATED.



Marketing to
penny pinchers

Making more money off your
dessert menu



WHAT MAKES A GREAT WEB SITE GREAT?

Discover the secrets behind three
award-winning restaurant Web sites

BY AMANDA C. KOOSER

THERE ARE A LOT OF PRETTY DECENT RESTAURANT WEB SITES OUT THERE, BUT SOME AREN'T content to just rest on their menus and contact information. Greatness comes down to the convergence of compelling design, informative content, simple navigation and the wild card factors of artistry and creativity. "One of the most important things that any restaurant can do is tie in the look and feel of their Web site with the experience that visitors are going to have when they actually come to the restaurant," says William Rice, president of the Web Marketing Association, one of several organizations that hand out awards to restaurant sites. Here are three recent award-winning sites, with a look inside what makes them great.

RESTAURANT: FOUR
WEB: fourtoronto.com
LOCATION: Toronto, ON
DESIGNER: Design Lab (designlab.net)
AWARD: * Web Marketing Association
WebAward: Best Restaurant Site, 2008

A strong Web site communicates the branding and image of the restaurant. In FOUR's case, that means hitting on the points that separate it from other restaurants. The Chef's Kitchen section highlights healthy eating options and provides information on the calorie counts of the dishes. But FOUR's site is about more than the nuts and bolts of the food; it also communicates the artistry of the restaurant's ambiance, décor and plate presentation with the goal of turning Web visitors into real-world customers. "We wanted to give a sense of how beautiful the food is and to make the user want to go into the restaurant. We wanted to give them a taste of what the restaurant offers," says Design Lab designer Kim Cullion. The entire site echoes the aesthetics of the restaurant's food and interior design.

The "four" theme appears again and again throughout the site. The front page echoes the restaurant logo while the animations—in the white bars—invoke the four elements. These same images are also used in a video art installation in the restaurant itself. These subtle repetitions help to solidify the brand in people's minds.

Simplicity is the best policy when it comes to site navigation. "It's really straightforward. You're not confused where to click," says Misty Beazley, vice president of the Signature Group, which operates FOUR.

Elegant video animations anchor the site concept. "It's a very upscale design and very strong animated images are used," says WMA president William Rice. "It's a simple way to use flash to bring the site to life without having to wait for big animations to load."



The bright green background is a bold choice with a purpose. "I used the lime as inspiration. The lime makes sense for a restaurant site, but also reflects that the food is very fresh and healthy at FOUR," says Cullion.

"Video is a major trend that is very important for restaurant Web sites," says Rice. The "In the News" link connects to press releases and online videos of television shows that have featured FOUR. Few internet technologies have the visual and emotional impact that video does. Finding ways to integrate video puts a site on the cutting edge and keeps visitors engaged.

FOUR's site combines art and design without forgetting functionality. "We use [the Web site] as an information gathering piece so that people can give us feedback and contact us about parties. So it's also very functional for our needs," says Misty Beazley.

RESTAURANT: Pizza Fusion
WEB: pizzafusion.com
LOCATION: Fort Lauderdale, FL
DESIGNER: SilverTech (silvertch.com)
AWARDS: * WMA WebAward: Outstanding Restaurant Web Site, 2008; * International Academy of Visual Arts W3 Gold Award

Web sites with a lot of information can still be handled in a fun, easy-to-navigate way. The Pizza Fusion site is tasked with communicating the young franchise's green philosophy while still showcasing the pizza. "The Web site had to show a true integration of mission and the ability to educate consumers on eco-friendly business practices as well as be engaging," says SilverTech strategist Erin Presseau. All of the design cues—from the colors chosen to the front page pictures—are geared to reaching one of three goals: One, give consumers information on the pizza and menu; two, promote the green message; and three, inform potential franchisees about the opportunities available.

This site rightfully puts the food out in front. "The first thing I see is obviously the pizza. The shape of our pizza stand out and makes us stand out. It's got my attention," says Pizza Fusion co-founder Vaughan Lazar.

Pizza Fusion has two audiences: consumers and franchisees. "The message for the two groups is so different that we ended up splitting the franchise part out a bit so it wouldn't impede the consumer experience," says Presseau. This link takes potential franchisees over to a subsite just for them.

The windmills rotate and a pop-up over the hybrid lets visitors know that Pizza Fusion uses environmentally conscious cars for delivery. "I like the subtle flash elements that don't obstruct the usability," says Presseau.

The use of vine images and the color green is subtle, but effective. "One thing we don't want to do is beat people over the head with our message all of the time. We don't want to scream green," says Lazar.

"The logos of their partners shows that what they're doing is going to meet the needs of people who are looking to eat green or organic. Here's the credibility," says WMA president William Rice.

The menu from the top is mirrored at the bottom of the page. "It's important to have consistent navigation to let people know where they are on the site, but to also make sure that all your pages are indexed appropriately by search engines," says Rice.

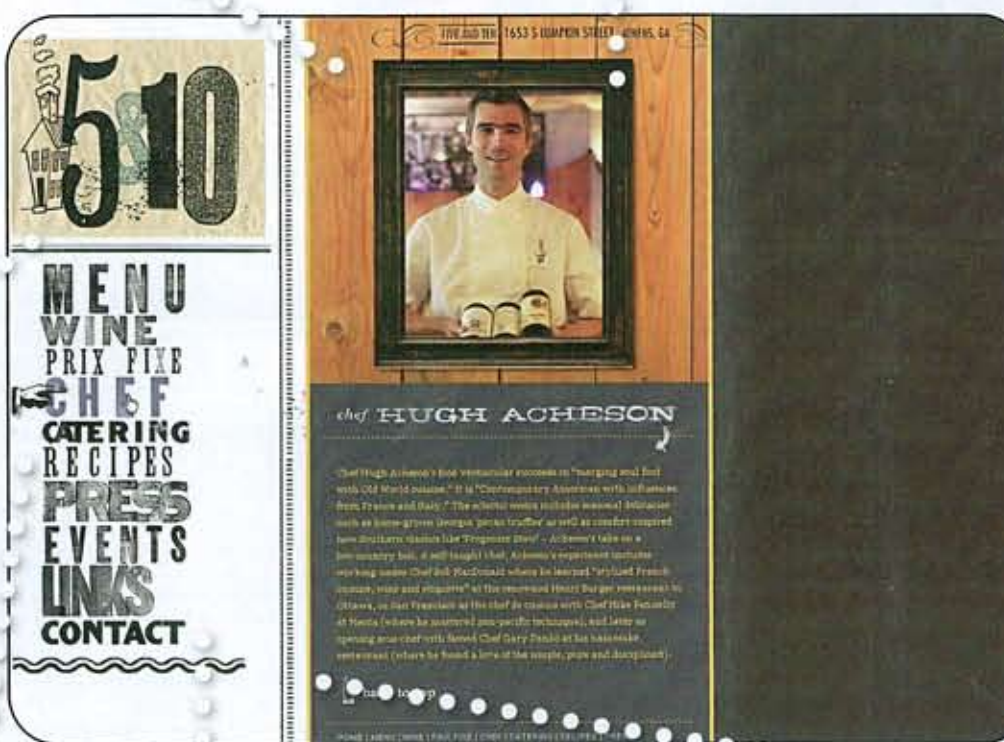


RESTAURANT: Five & Ten
WEB: fiveandten.com
LOCATION: Athens, GA
DESIGNER: Green Olive Media (greenolivemedia.com)
AWARD: * Horizon Interactive Awards Silver, 2008

A creative visual approach can set a site apart from the crowd. Five & Ten owner and chef Hugh Acheson knows what he wants out of a restaurant Web site: give the basic information, keep it simple and make it look good. He says, "I like to think of Web sites as file cabinets. It's clear and the structure is straightforward. You don't want to drown your audience in information." The site's no-nonsense approach puts all the basic information like contacts, menu and catering within easy reach of Web visitors. It's the down-home flair of the design that sets it apart from other restaurant sites and makes it an award-winner.

Many great sites start with the designer visiting the restaurant. "The restaurant itself is fairly simple. There are a lot of natural materials in the restaurant. That's where the concept came from," says Green Olive creative director Jeff Moore.

Customized design elements bring a unique touch to the Web site. "The background is actually a piece of butcher paper that we took, crumpled up and scanned in. The typeface comes from old wood blocks. It's all very tactile," says Moore.



"The bric-a-brac look of it shows that it's a community restaurant that is not meant to be very fancy," says Acheson. New customers will have a good idea what to expect when they actually go to the restaurant.

Sometimes the simplest solutions are the right solutions and can save the restaurant money. "The reservation form system under the contact link has allowed us to not have to go through a service like OpenTable," says Acheson. Forms can be used for feedback, contact and reservations.

The small visual touches add up. "The site was outside the norm and demonstrated a real artistic flair. The branding was well done from an artistic perspective," says Mike Sauce, founder of the Horizon Interactive Awards (horizoninteractive-awards.com).

Web sites aren't static creatures. "The Web site gives us room to grow. The recipe section will expand as time goes on," says Acheson. Updates give customers a reason to revisit your site.