

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.

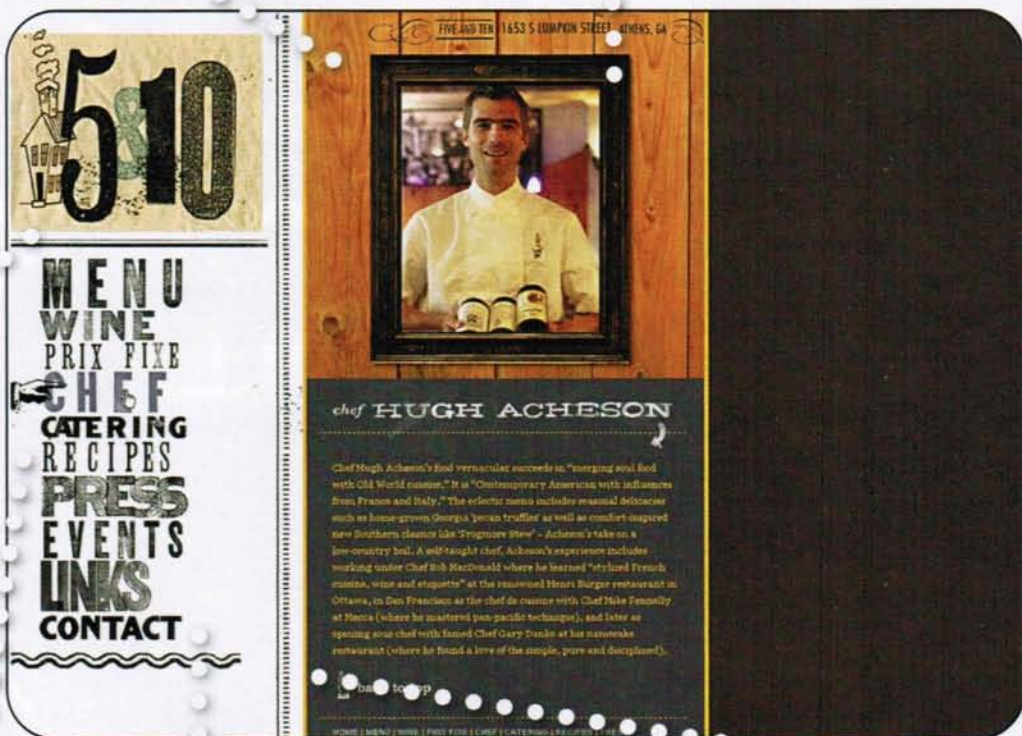
RESTAURANT: Five & Ten
WEB: fiveandten.com
LOCATION: Athens, GA
DESIGNER: Green Olive Media
 (greenolivemedia.com)
AWARD: ★ Horizon Interactive Awards
 Silver, 2008

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.



Almost famous

Five mistakes that keep a good Web site from becoming great

1 LACK OF UPDATES: Fresh content gives visitors a reason to return to both your Web site and your restaurant. SilverTech strategist Erin Presseau says, "Many restaurants do not update their Web sites regularly. What is the restaurant doing in the community? What recent reviews are available? 'There's a blizzard outside but, yes, we're still open tonight.'"

2 POOR PHOTOGRAPHY: You've seen those food pictures that make you think "ick" instead of "yum." "Food photography is a very tricky skill to master, and shooting your food with a point-and-shoot digital camera won't cut it" says Green Olive creative director Jeff Moore.

3 DOING IT YOURSELF: "There's a reason that chefs make the food and designers build the Web sites. You may be able to cobble together a functioning Web site with free software, but that's no substitute for the quality of work that you will get from a professional design firm," says Moore.

4 NOT BRINGING THE DESIGNER IN: If the purpose of a Web site is to communicate the feel and food of a restaurant, bring the designer in for a hands-on visit. "It helps if the designer can experience the restaurant before designing the Web site. This helps capture the feeling and tone of the restaurant with the right color palette, fonts and imagery," says Design Lab designer Kim Cullion.

5 MISSING SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION: "Search engines are changing their algorithms so frequently that most restaurants do not have search engine friendly sites," says Presseau. "Optimizing your site for search is such an affordable way to draw in new guests—much less expensive than print or radio advertising and it is much more effective." SEO is the ongoing art and science of improving your search engine rankings. It helps old and new customers alike find your restaurant online. □

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