

GLEBE BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT AREA – INTHEGLEBE.CA
2018 IDA AWARD SUBMISSION
Category: Marketing and Communications



INTHEGLEBE.CA: AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE DIGITAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

From the moment the Glebe Business Improvement Area was created, we have had our eye on one main goal: to turn Ottawa’s oldest, most beloved neighbourhood into the most forward-thinking location in the country.

The first step? Give the Glebe and its merchants a strong, unified digital presence within our own BIA website. After two years of live experimentation, intheglebe.ca's most recent redesign was completed to improve user navigation and search, provide merchants and website administrators with more intuitive management, and improve the overall mobile, content-driven experience.

THE CHALLENGE: MORE THAN A WEBSITE

A digital presence for a neighbourhood goes beyond your standard information website for any individual business. Simply put, visitors expect to find what they’re looking for quickly and easily while on the go – and there is a lot to discover in the Glebe. With nearly 400 merchants in the catchment, a bustling traditional main street, a new state-of-the-art entertainment and shopping destination complete with a 24,000-seat sports stadium, ongoing major events and a roster of stunning attractions, there is a lot of content to cover. Moreover, our new website would have to speak to the neighbourhood brand and reflect its fabled history while building on our own ‘hip factor’.

Our area needed more than your average website. We needed a location-centric content strategy with a user-focused information architecture, a creative voice and tone, and tactics for frequent, ongoing content management on a large scale. The site had to capture the essence and spirit of the Glebe neighbourhood, highlighting the area’s features, advantages and benefits for all audiences, while serving the ongoing needs of member businesses.

THE OPPORTUNITY: THE DIGITAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

As in any high-street neighbourhood, most Glebe merchants face common challenges in the digital age. Small businesses that have finite resources find it difficult to effectively and consistently manage their websites and social media channels. Keeping up with digital trends and competing with online shopping websites while running their day-to-day operations has been an ongoing challenge.

But what if we could relieve merchants from some of these digital woes? By giving members the tools to manage their individual business profiles and promotions via intheglebe.ca – and guiding them on best practices – merchants would effectively help build our website into a community hub while leveraging our own marketing skills to act as a much-needed bullhorn for the entire neighbourhood. This would allow us to collectively elevate the area as a premiere leisure destination.

The best approach to this would be to make it simple and painless, but not just for the merchants. The entire user experience would have to be as simple as possible, for both consumers and business owners.

To that end, the new intheglebe.ca would have to be designed for a simple but effective user experience on all fronts — from navigation and search functionality, to administration — and refined over time to provide users with a truly useful website.

THE SOLUTION: USER-DRIVEN EVOLUTION

Creating a digital experience reflective of the Glebe would take extensive research, a robust, thought-out digital strategy, and a user-focused design. With this in mind, we partnered with a digital agency and a local service provider and worked with key stakeholders to better understand how our members use the web for business. The findings were compiled to produce a base set of requirements on which the website was built. Over two years, many of the website features were improved on and modified, based on the results of the live testing, feedback and analytics that revealed an evolved set of user-driven directives.

The redesign has brought many new features to intheGLEBE.ca, including a self-generating events calendar and promotions page, ongoing blog content, and a cleaner, slicker design that relies on strong imagery and storytelling. The site also boasts a Doing Business in the Glebe page that features live property listings and research data that makes a strong case for new ventures to set up shop in the Glebe. In addition to the esthetic changes, we also improved navigation and page load times for users and improved browsing and search functionalities within the site. With mobile and content at the core of the web experience, designers paid particular attention to responsive designs for the smartphone and website administration tools to ensure that members and website admins could easily and effectively manage content.

INTHEGLEBE.CA BY THE NUMBERS

The new reincarnation of intheGLEBE.ca seemed to strike the right chords with members. The site saw 324 per cent more member promotions posted to the site in 2017. Our website page views increased by 63 per cent over the previous year, while the number of events posted to intheGLEBE.ca rose by a whopping 400 per cent. A total of 65 blogs were published throughout 2017 that highlighted Glebe events, attractions and promotions.

INTHEGLEBE.CA - FEATURE IMPROVEMENTS

FOR VISITORS

- Mobile-first design.
- Quick loading.
- Simple browsing and intuitive search.
- Timely, local content.
- Accessible.
- Self-generating events calendar and promotions page.

FOR MERCHANTS / PUBLISHERS

- Simple on-boarding.
- In-depth, standards-compliant merchant profiles.
- User-Managed accounts, listings, promotions, events, and properties.
- Built-in tools for local SEO and reputation-management.

FOR ADMINISTRATORS

- Modern, visual style, voice and tone reflective of Glebe brand.
- Aspirational photography and video.
- Simple and clear content management.

In concert with our strategic communications and a major marketing campaign, as well as our social media channels, intheGLEBE.ca has allowed us to further build and connect with key audiences and maximize brand awareness for the area and its members.