Maps.com

CLIENT SUCCESS: VISUS DESIGN AND ENGINEERING PROCESS

SNAPSHOT

MAPS.com

Maps.com is well known as a premier online source of maps, atlases, globes, and other mapping products. It is also the supplier of an award-winning educational platform called Maps 101 that provides educators with tools, content, and lesson plans for the social sciences. More than 2.5 million K-12 students use Maps 101.

Since 2002, Maps.com has been represented online by a website that was built using in-house resources. As the company grew, the limitations of its website became apparent. The site was not originally designed with a long-term strategy for expansion. This made it difficult to scale the site, automate back-end processes, and add new functionality. A cluttered user interface made navigation challenging.

Maps.com asked Visus LLC for help modernizing its online presence to improve e-commerce capabilities, streamline the user experience, and support other areas it engages in beyond e-commerce—particularly education. Visus suggested that Maps.com undergo a design and engineering process. Also known as a discovery process, the purpose of this critical phase is to formulate a clear vision for the project and establish a solid foundation for new functionality. In this case, the process yielded wireframes and graphical mockups of each page on the new website, functional and technical specifications, and database design.

ORGANIZATION
Founded in 1991 as Magellan Geographix, Maps.com is a leading provider of mapping products and solutions to business, education, and consumer markets. Company headquarters are in Santa Barbara, California.

CHALLENGE
Help the company define and understand its requirements for a new e-commerce platform and refine the processes and technologies that support its business.

STRATEGY
Guide representatives from all company departments through a design and engineering process spanning a series of structured in-person sessions. Gather insight from stakeholders and industry best practices to establish foundational elements, specifications, and database design.

RESULTS
Maps.com now has a solid foundation for building an e-commerce platform that will meet the company's diverse needs far into the future. New strategies are in place that will integrate its web-based systems with back-end business processes to improve connections with distributors and suppliers.

> "Visus came highly recommended to us from other businesses in our region. After communicating with other providers both domestic and international, we saw that Visus was highly recommended for a reason. The Visus team is experienced, poised, and patient. We wouldn't hesitate to engage them again."
>
> – Bill Spicer, President, Maps.com

"The Visus design and engineering process was the best thing for us," says Bill Spicer, president of Maps.com. "It brought representatives from every department of our company to the table and gave them an equal voice. That helped us develop a more synergistic and all-encompassing vision. And it enabled us to put the framework and structure in place for an online presence that can meet the diverse needs of our fast growing company."

> "The discovery sessions gave us the rare opportunity to involve several stakeholders with various perspectives in a single group. We dissected every aspect of our website and evaluated them. The dedicated meetings allowed us to focus on the task at hand, away from our daily responsibilities."
>
> – Robert Burns, Marketing Director, Maps.com

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Defining Site Elements and Information Flow

Visus consultants met in person with Maps.com personnel sixteen times over eight weeks. Through structured meetings, they studied numerous e-commerce websites, identified best practices, and advised the client on how to create an optimal online platform.

> "The Visus team helped our people to be more introspective and examine our processes. They helped us look more deeply into what we are doing and how we are doing it. There was huge value in identifying and prioritizing our needs."
>
> – Bill Spicer, President, Maps.com

The group drafted site hierarchies, page elements, buttons, navigational features and other details. Visus graphic designers illustrated these website concepts as offline HTML pages so that the client could visualize the new design. In addition, with the guidance of a user-experience expert from Visus, they discussed how best to direct website visitors to the products they want to see and how to move them through to an easy and smooth checkout process.

"The Visus team was very good at conceptualizing the high level flow of information and how that would impact the user experience," Spicer says. "They turned nebulous ideas and topics into concrete concepts. They were able to clarify ideas for non-technical members of our staff by bringing technical concepts down to a business value level."

> "The Visus team kept our people on track, focused, and goal-oriented. They provided a structured setting that got us all on the same page and enabled us to gain insight into development, best practices, and our own organizational processes."
>
> – Lauren Perez, Marketing and Media Strategist, Maps.com

Refining Back-End Processes

In addition to improving the user experience, Maps.com sought better controls and automation at the back end. Through the meetings, Visus helped the company visualize how its shipping database and product database should be designed, how to improve the way it manages its supply chain, and how to streamline various business processes.

"We anticipate that the design and strategy that Visus helped us formulate will better integrate our back end supply chain with the purchasing process," Spicer says. "That affects how we deal with our distributors and suppliers. It's where the Visus discovery process had the biggest impact and where we expect to see our ROI."

The team at Maps.com discovered that there is immense value in ensuring that they have a solid foundation for their new online presence. Company leaders are now confident that they have planned for all contingencies, laying the groundwork for a platform that will have a long lifespan.

"Through its design and engineering process Visus helped us design an online experience that will make it easier for our customers to do business with us, streamline back-end processes, and bring visibility to other aspects of our business that have become buried in our current outreach," Spicer summarizes. "The experience exceeded our expectations."

> "Through its discovery process, Visus did a great job of helping us understand what works and what doesn't work on our website. We now have a much clearer vision of what we can change to identify better with our online customers. Everyone at Visus was exceptionally professional. Their knowledge of the web development process really shines through."
>
> – Heather Chamberlain, Marketing Specialist, Maps.com

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