Promoting Interfaith Earth Care

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

In order to effectively reach out to its community, any local organization needs a well-designed set of marketing materials. By working with a local faith-based environmental group named Interfaith Earth Care (IEC), I was able to help the organization promote itself to the public. The organization was seeking to create a more organized public face that included a new name, a new logo, and a new website. The intent of this project was to assist IEC in communicating better with the public by providing the organization with a robust set of promotion tools.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Joshua Gruver for advising me throughout the course of this project. His assistance and insight in developing this project were invaluable. I would also like to thank professor Scott Truex for his help in discovering this project, Jennifer Rice-Snow from IEC for allowing me to assist her organization, and Anna for her graphic design consulting. Additional thanks go to Dan, Sam, and Tom for their advice and support throughout the project.
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Artist's Statement

Introduction

Although my educational background is in urban planning, I have also taken an interest in environmental issues, which led me to work with a local organization in Delaware County, Interfaith Earth Care (IEC), for my honors project. Planning for communities and environment issues often overlap. Increasingly cities and towns are taking environmental issues into account as they develop community plans. To understand more about environmental issues I sought out an opportunity to provide practical help to a local organization, eventually making contact with IEC.

IEC is a local chapter of a statewide organization (Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light or H-IPL) which in turn is affiliated with the national organization Interfaith Power and Light. According to its mission statement IEC “is an interfaith group that accepts our urgent, moral responsibility to care for creation.” It seeks to “bring people of faith together to help curb global climate change and bring about healthy, life-sustaining practices on earth, by educating, acting and speaking up.”

Jennifer, a founding member of the IEC steering committee, communicated a need for effectively reaching the community. After some discussion we decided a more descriptive name, an improved logo, and a more professional online presence would help promote the organization. Each of these projects will be discussed briefly.
Components of the Project

A New Name

Before creating a logo or website, it was essential to first develop a name that best represented the organization. Because of its affiliation with the statewide H-IPL, the local chapter of the organization was referred to as the H-IPL Delaware County Chapter. Jennifer suggested developing a new name for the local chapter of the organization to make it easier to associate the name with the goals of the organization.

The previous name sounded more like a utility company than a gathering of individuals from a variety of faith communities. Understanding this discrepancy between the organization’s name and its values, I began developing a number of ideas for a new name.

Eventually I presented several names to the H-IPL steering committee. Upon voting, the committee selected the name Interfaith Earth Care. This name reflects the variety of faith communities represented by the organization as well as its commitment toward being responsible stewards of the earth.

Muncie Interfaith Association
Interfaith Stewardship Alliance
Responsible Earth Care
Interfaith Earth Care

By working with IEC I created a series of three new logos (see Figure 2) that incorporate the organization’s new name and its values. After a committee meeting, one of the three logos was chosen to represent the organization.

This logo features a simple tree outline with a colored gradient fill (see Figure 3). The tree represents IEC’s commitment to care for the environment, while the colors (in place of religious symbols) reflect the diverse faith communities active in the organization. Interfaith Earth Care’s title is situated to the lower right of the tree image. The crisp font, rendered in lowercase demonstrates the organized and planned nature of IEC’s activities, while also suggesting a practical and “down-to-earth” approach to community involvement.

A New Face

Once the name was in place, the next task was to design an easily recognizable logo that would reflect the values of IEC. Previously the local chapter used the statewide H-IPL logo (see Figure 1). Unfortunately, this logo does not strongly reflect either the uniqueness of the Delaware County Chapter or the variety of faiths involved with this chapter.

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A New Online Presence

The final step of the project involved creating an entirely new website for IEC to give the organization greater flexibility in promoting its activities. The new website replaced the IEC's old webpage which was previously hosted on the statewide H-IPL site.

Unfortunately, this website was difficult to navigate and gave little freedom for each individual chapter to customize its own site with relevant information. Realizing the limitations of the statewide site, I suggested creating a website for IEC distinct from the statewide site. The IEC committee agreed with my suggestion and I began work on the new design.

The primary aim of the website is post updates on current IEC events, provide visitors with resources related to environmental issues, answer frequently asked questions about the organization and provide a means of contacting IEC.

With these goals in mind, I worked through a website called Weebly, which allowed me to choose a template and easily customize and add content to develop a new website.

Eventually the website emerged, giving IEC a more vibrant online presence. At the time of this project, the layout for the website is finished, but content is still being added (see Figure 4). The website can be accessed at www.interfaithearthcare.org.
Figure 4: Website template featuring the IEC home page
Personal Development

Throughout the course of the project I was challenged to think in new and creative ways. I learned essential communication skills that can be applied to any profession.

Visual Communication

First, I deepened my understanding of visual communication and its role in conveying a specific message to a target audience. Creating an effective logo for a company or organization poses a critical challenge. It is not a task that can be completed overnight, but one that takes many design iterations and constant communication between the designer and the client. The designer needs to fully understand what defines the organization. He also needs to think about how his target audience will perceive the design. As described previously, the logo is intended to visually communicate IEC's mission to others.

Designing a logo for IEC showed me that I have to think on multiple levels to create visuals that resonate with the organization they represent and the people they are trying to reach. Using visual communication effectively is an essential skill to possess in any job. There will always be a need to communicate well with people, whether they are employers, employees, clients, or the general public.

Interpersonal skills

Additionally, my experiences with this project, particularly the many interactions with the client, helped me develop and hone my interpersonal communication skills. Throughout the course of the project I met with Jennifer several times to discuss the logo, website, and other matters related to the project. Right from the start I realized the necessity of listening to Jennifer to understand what the organization really needed. Coming into the project, I had ideas about what I thought they needed. I quickly realized I needed to put my ideas aside and listen to Jennifer if I was to help IEC.

I also learned to match my level of formality to that with which Jennifer was comfortable. Previously I imagined our interactions would be formal, but found that I had to relax to communicate effectively. A more formal interaction would have made it difficult to discuss and share ideas. I had to adapt and be flexible.

Working Autonomously

Third, my experiences taught me the value of working autonomously. In psychology it is understood that autonomy encourages engagement. When people are given freedom to work on their own, they tend to be more productive than if they are simply told to do specific things. On this project, I saw this concept in action. IEC was not telling me what to do or forcing me to work. The work I did for them was voluntary, which meant it was my responsibility to ensure I was performing the work I had promised to do for them. Consequently, this did help me to be more responsible and engaged in the project. Instead of waiting to be contacted by IEC, I took the initiative to contact them and set up meetings to discuss the project. In the future I can use this skill of working independently to jumpstart projects and work diligently on them to their completion.