

## **CANDO! has new Web site Fishin' for jobs with the 'Net**

**BY JOHN JARVIS – THE MARION STAR – JUNE 14, 2009**

The sign might hang appropriately on the front door of the Marion CANDO! building at 205 W. Center St.

Work not leisure, however, is the objective of this enterprise. And no rod and reel is the tool being used. Instead, the economic development agent for the city and county is casting a large Net in hopes of landing as many employers and jobs as it can.

The Internet and a strong presence there will be instrumental in Marion developing economically, CANDO!'s marketing committee has decided. Revamping the organization's Web site, marioncando.com, was key, said Craig Thompson, CANDO! president.

"A lot of the marketing is done over the Internet," Thompson said. "We're focusing a lot of resources in that area to get Marion out there and in front of as many people, businesses, site selection consultants as we can."

While the nonprofit agency had a Web site, Thompson and the marketing panel felt it could be better and decided to contract with TRECA to give it a fresh and more user-friendly appearance.

"The previous one, it was done very well, it was a good Web site, but it seemed to me to be a little bit cluttered," he said.

Enter Dustin Kraus, a file maker/Web developer for TRECA's research and development department. Kraus gave CANDO!'s marketing committee two designs from which to choose. The layout currently available to the Internet public but with some construction to be done is the design the panel picked.

"It's more of a modern design," said Kraus, who pointed out that the change is not about appearance solely, but functionality, as well. "It's a lot more standards-based, Web standards-based. That means it'll show the way it's supposed to in all kinds of browsers."

Web sites that don't so closely adhere to Web standards display in a variety of versions depending on the type of browser used by the Internet searcher.

"If the design is more of a standards-based, especially with what Marion CANDO! does they need to hit as many of those folks as possible," he said.

Kraus also cleaned up the appearance, another important factor in gaining more views by the corporations, potential employers and their site selection consultants.

"That's one of the things I love to do," he said. "This is one of the first times I've used this type of layout, and I was very pleased with the way it turned out. Personally, I like clean Web sites. ... I think it works better, because people don't read the Web, they skim the Web. They look for the bits of information they want and if they can't find those bits of information quickly, they're off looking somewhere else. You try to get as much information into as little space as possible."

He included a Flash slide show to display Marion landmarks and a video focusing on the community's spirit and other strengths.

CANDO! also had Kraus include a "button," entitled "You'll Feel Right at Home," on the Web site, where a click of the mouse links the visitor to the Youllfeelrightathome.com Web site, still under construction by CANDO!, which will provide information about workforce, utilities, local government and other Marion data.

To increase the chances that potential employers will find its new Web site, CANDO! placed an electronic banner advertisement on sitenet.com, Thompson said.

"I consider it to be one of the premier Web sites for site selection consultants and corporate relocation professionals," he said. "We wanted to get Marion in front of them." Click on the ad, and it takes the clicker to marioncando.com. "Site selection consultants generally are working with corporations or businesses in an attempt to find them a location."

CANDO! administrative assistant Denny Ferguson added content from the organization's former Web site, while Kraus was responsible for the layout and Flash content on the new Web site. A new wrinkle on the Web site is the ability for visitors to click on greenfields, industrial buildings and office sites on the "Available Properties" page to download pdfs displaying a comprehensive array of information on the individual property.

Ferguson, Kraus said, is converting all of those to display the new Web site's look and colors, and such consistency boosts a community's image.

"A company that has all the print and electronic media looking the same to me says that company knows how to get that message out there and is willing to take the time to change everything to match one common message," Kraus said.

Roxane Somerlot, executive director for Marion County Job and Family Services and a member of the marketing committee, said the new Web site raises Marion in the eyes of potential employers.

“We wanted to start with having a strong and unified presence on the Internet to make sure Marion was represented there, and all of the partners that have a vested interest and work cooperatively in economic development are part of that initial site,” Somerlot said.

Thompson said CANDO! is supplementing the Web site to hook potential employers, sending out digital postcards it printed out to more than 200 site selection consultants nationwide, “and again it leads them back to the Web site.”

He targeted the wind and solar industries in the agency’s first round of postcards with the objective of showing that Marion offers an attractive labor force and infrastructure for players in those green enterprises.

“And plus we have the existing buildings here in Marion as well as available land for development,” he said. “That’s a tremendous benefit,” perhaps enough to land an economic turnaround.