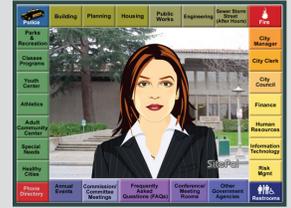


SitePal avatar, Carly, greets San Carlos City Hall visitors, saving City Hall \$90K a year



Case study #16: The City of San Carlos

August 2008

ABOUT THE CITY HALL OF SAN CARLOS

The City of San Carlos provides high-quality services and facilities in a fiscally sustainable, responsive and friendly manner to foster a safe and healthy community. It also provides information and services to residents on an ongoing basis, and strives to communicate with the public, oral or written, in a manner that is clear, concise, consistent and easy to access. The City's departments strive to utilize all communication possibilities (Web site, television and other currently available resources), as efficiently as possible to assure that the residents remain informed and aware on a regular basis.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

When the City of San Carlos was faced with general fund budget cuts of approximately \$1.2 million, it meant losing a receptionist at City Hall. The City asked Jasmine Frost, the City's Webmaster and Sr. Systems Analyst, to create a kiosk containing important City Hall contacts and phone numbers so the city's constituents could easily reach those with whom they wished to speak.

Jasmine created the kiosk as requested, but decided the city needed to take a different route after she determined that using the kiosk was far too time consuming. She wanted visitors to have a more interactive experience; similar to one they would have if there were a real receptionist at the front desk. Therefore, Jasmine decided to browse the Internet to research alternative technology options.



SOLUTIONS

After searching online for a viable and affordable solution, Jasmine found SitePal – an Internet service that allows users to easily create and add a fully speaking avatar to their Web sites, Flash applications and emails with little or no programming skills necessary.

From the SitePal platform, Jasmine created Carly, an interactive avatar that resides on a computer screen at the city's front desk. Carly, named after the town by City Manager, Mark Weiss, is designed to greet visitors and provide much of the assistance a human used to offer. Users can interact with Carly by clicking on the icons that surround her, gaining access to valuable information including department phone numbers and directions to the many city hall offices.



Carly, an interactive avatar named after the city, resides on a computer screen at the City Hall's front desk. Visitors get valuable City Hall information by clicking the icons and interacting with Carly.

RESULTS

The virtual receptionist is poised to save San Carlos \$90,000 per year. Carly's deployment comes at a time when the city is trying to trim \$1.2 million from its budget. Assistant City Manager, Brian Moura said, "The city isn't suggesting an avatar can replace a real live receptionist, and city officials hope to have the general fund cuts restored so we can return a live receptionist to the front desk. But in the meantime, Carly is substituting for a \$90,000/year funding cut, and visitors appear to like her."

In addition, constituents have grown to appreciate engaging with Carly to obtain the valuable information necessary to reach the city's various departments and representatives. "San Carlos has always been a leader when it comes to implementing new technology practices, and many cities look to us as an example of how they, too, can use technology to effectively achieve their goals," said Jasmine.



In the near future, Jasmine plans on updating Carly to “Carly 2.0” to include an Artificial Intelligence Management Center (AIMC) – a powerful tool that will allow the city to “teach” Carly to respond to users questions with context-sensitive, spoken answers.

“San Carlos has always been committed to excellent customer service,” said Jasmine. “She is one of the many ways in which we’ve been able to remain on the cutting-edge.”

ABOUT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE OF SITEPAL

The SitePal Artificial Intelligence (AI) feature allows an animated character (or “Bot”) to respond to user questions with context-sensitive spoken answers. For example, when a user types in a question, the Site-Pal AI engine retrieves relevant information from the knowledge base and the SitePal bot speaks the answer. The SitePal AI knowledgebase contains 23,000 pieces of unique information ready to use, but the users can further edit the knowledgebase to customize the database to their needs. The A.I feature is available in the SitePal gold package. To learn more, visit www.SitePal.com

“Our constituents appear to really enjoy interacting with Carly, and we’re eager to continue adding additional features to make Carly the best she can be.”

*Jasmine Frost,
Sr. system analyst,
City of San Carlos*

