

Case Study

South Downs Food and Drink Finder

Background

Consuming locally produced food and drink has a great deal of benefits, not only for the consumer but also for the local environment and economy.

Natural Partnerships Community Interest Company (CIC) is a not-for-profit organisation based in Sussex which manages projects to promote food and farming. Their goal is to help both local communities and visitors to the South Downs region to discover, buy, eat and enjoy locally produced food and drink.

After consultations with local farmers, food and drink producers and local communities, CIC identified that information about locally produced food and drink was disjointed and hard to find.

Their vision was to create a navigable, attractive and informative website, acting as a centralised information hub, where locals and visitors to the South Downs can easily locate where to eat, buy and enjoy locally produced food and drink.

southdownsfood.org was subsequently created and is self-managed by local food and drink businesses, producers, retailers, and hospitality venues. The website includes a Google based foodfinder map and is a superb tool to help attract food destination tourists to the region.



The Project

The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) identified a strategic aim to support the producers and distributors of local food in the region and were keen to partner the project, along with Southern Co-op.

The partners explored exactly what key stakeholders wanted from the portal and agreed to undertake a complex website build, which is not only searchable, but covers the entire South Downs region and a 10-mile border. The portal used the South Downs National Park shared identity to enhance the visual impact of the site.

The project, managed by CIC, ran from May 2014 to April 2016. The total cost of the project (£49,500) was funded jointly by the SDNPA and Southern Co-op and was delivered on budget, representing very good value for money.

The South Downs businesses featured on the site manage their own information and integrity checks are carried out annually to ensure the information is correct, relevant and current.

The portal itself is easily navigable. The mapping function within 'food finder' allows the visitor to see relevant information at a glance but can also easily filter search results. The website hosts a wealth of information including a comprehensive 'What's On' calendar promoting local food and drink events, courses, markets and experiences. News, editorial features, chef of the month, recipes, competitions and promotions also feature.

The portal has changing content, including tweets, newsletters, blogs and videos, in order to encourage regular visits to the site and, subsequently, to the South Downs which supports the local rural economy and encourages sustainability.

“We are so thrilled that the portal is available! It provides visitors and locals with the opportunity to see the fabulous variety of produce on our doorstep. From our perspective, it’s a way for us to look at local suppliers to support and work with. So the portal is not only accessible for the general public but from business to business.”

Lesley Foulkes, Langham Brewery

The outcome

southdownsfood.org has become the ‘go to’ site when seeking local food and drink in the South Downs region. The statistics since the site was launched are as follows:

- 15,000 users with over 60,000 page views.
- Subscribers to the monthly newsletter increased by over 1,500 to 12,000 subscribers.
- 1,445 twitter followers of **@southdownsfood**, creating 1,594 tweets.
- 320 listed businesses have promoted 1,499 events.
- A survey via ‘Foodie News’, the monthly newsletter, informed us that 85% of subscribers valued the Calendar of Events and 100% of respondents valued the newsletter.

To ensure sustainability of the portal, a business plan was developed to include sponsorship, advertising and other projects in order to fund continued maintenance of the site.

An example of this is ‘**The Local Food Detective**’, a project fully funded by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). This project is an easy to use marketing template for accommodation providers which ensures visitors to the area are directed to the best places to buy and eat local food, along with activities using the ‘What’s On’ calendar.

The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan

The implementation of the new portal was consistent with the following outcomes in the South Downs Partnership Management Plan:

5. Outstanding visitor experiences are underpinned by a high-quality access and sustainable transport network supporting improved health and wellbeing.
6. There is widespread understanding of the special qualities of the National Park and the benefits it provides.

The future

It is imperative to maintain a simple to use, attractive website with engaging and changing content.

The long-term sustainability of the site has been secured through sponsorship, advertising and additional project opportunities.

The businesses featured value the networking opportunities which arise through southdownsfood.org where they meet other businesses and potential customers.

The site also creates opportunities for follow-on projects which develop the site further such as ‘The Local Food Detective’.



For further information, please contact:

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