



Butcher cuts a dashing figure

Cumbræ's firmly believes elegant online design is worth paying for

Hype can be fatally distracting. In the last couple of years, small business owners have flitted from one new-media promotional darling to another: Twitter and Facebook and Groupon, oh my! But too many entrepreneurs have overlooked the importance of that old pillar of new media: an elegantly designed website. Earlier this year, Cumbræ's, a local Toronto butcher with three retail locations and a wholesale operation that caters to chefs, unveiled a re-freshed site that does what the best physical storefronts do: offers up an engaging image that prompts passersby to step through the door and sample the charms inside. —Simon Houpt



ADVICE FOR THE DIY CROWD

FORGET E-COMMERCE, TELL A STORY

Cumbræ's knows that building a relationship with customers is more important in the long term than making a single sale. So its website forgoes e-commerce—and all of its logistical hassles—in favour of helping customers get more out of the purchases they make in the store. There are recipes, instructional videos, and background information on Cumbræ's products, such as its heritage breed of turkeys and Niagara Gold whey-fed pork. The site is divided into three sections, representing an animal's journey to the plate: farm, store, table. "I wanted to keep everything super short. People don't want to read huge essays," explains owner Stephen Alexander. "You tell them what you do in a few sentences, and let the videos tell the story."

FIND THE RIGHT PARTNER

Cumbræ's has been working with the Toronto design and brand consultancy q30 Design for about seven years, forming a relationship defined by its honesty and openness. Like a good friend, an advertising or design agency will warn their clients if they are about to take a wrong step. Glenda Rissman, the co-founder of q30, recalls that Alexander once came to her with an image of a stylized cleaver he thought would be cool to use on his staff's T-shirts. "I said to him: 'If you had one tiny shop in Kensington Market, you could. But you have a very specific client base, and as much as I love that cleaver, it's not you.'"

GOOD DESIGN IS AN INVESTMENT, NOT A FRILL

"If a new business thinks about design from the beginning, it forces them to think strategically from the get-go," says Rissman. In the past year, Alexander figures he's spent about \$50,000 on marketing, which includes all the brochures, bag stuffers, recipe cards and—the biggest expense—the website redesign. "It's not chump change," he admits. "I could have done the website myself with one of the people in my office, slapped something together, but it would have been very unprofessional and not the way to go." Adds Rissman: "The market is just so crowded—people are bombarded in so many ways, with advertising, the Web, etc. You have such a tiny window in which to tell your story, it had better be told quickly and right."



Stephen Alexander of Cumbræ's with Glenda Rissman of brand consultancy q30 Design

Industry Canada defines a small business as one that has fewer than 100 employees

130,000

Small businesses launched annually in Canada from 2002 to 2006

5 million

Number of Canadians employed by small businesses as of 2009

\$723

Average weekly earnings of small-business employees in Canada in 2009

