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Table of Contents

WEB PORTAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE
JONESBORO CENTRAL PLANNING ASSOCIATION –
APPLIED LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM 1
Henry G. Torres, Arkansas State University

Authors' Index 5

WEB PORTAL DEVELOPMENT FOR THE JONESBORO CENTRAL PLANNING ASSOCIATION – APPLIED LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

The MBA class for Systems Analysis and Design participated in a real experience project that was funded by the Horizon Institute of Technology. The Jonesboro Central Planning Association (JCPA) was in the process of renovating the downtown district environment of Jonesboro Arkansas. The association is heavily involved in revitalizing the downtown business district by participating in and managing many of the following projects:

- *The new streetscape and landscape of the downtown area*
- *Holiday events – downtown parades, Santa’s Winter Wonderland*
- *Rocking on the Ridge Downtown Jazz Festival*
- *Renovation of historical downtown buildings*
- *Marketing the leasing of downtown retail and office space*
- *Marketing of downtown group-organized retail sales*
- *Involvement with the Chamber of Commerce in revitalizing the downtown business district*

INTRODUCTION

There was not an efficient, standard, consistent or frequent means of gathering and presenting a unified view of information to the public in Northeast Arkansas specifically recognizing the activities highlighting the Jonesboro downtown district.

The association was seeking to solve this problem by establishing an internet presence by way of creating a web portal that would facilitate in informing and directing the public in Northeast Arkansas and any web visitors to the downtown district. The portal would provide information regarding: the historical downtown area, opportunities in marketing, highlight downtown merchants and businesses, market available building leasing, and present detailed news/special events that are occurring in the downtown district. In addition, the association wanted to make the portal a common link of communication and a mechanism of web entry and presence for many of the downtown businesses and merchants.

At the time of Grant funding, there were 140 individual members in the association with over 20 business and merchant memberships. The association boasts that only approximately 10% of the membership has any web presence, marketing and/or ecommerce activity on the internet. The design and development of a web portal would provide a technological solution to providing a consistent means of communication (email) and increasing the web presence (individual and business home pages) for all association members with options to create their own ecommerce web store, thus creating a downtown “i-Mall” that could enhance retail sales for the downtown district.

The association provides many of their services free of charge and the minimal membership fees that are collected are used for monthly business bulletins and/or newsletters. The association has a board of directors that are volunteers and local supporters. The association sought assistance from the Arkansas State University Master in Business program in the following: (1) defining and designing the web portal, (2) creation of a Request for Proposal (RFP) that could be used by a web

development company to create the web portal, and (3) grant funding to pay for the initial development, implementation and hosting of the web portal.

PROJECT GOALS:

The main project goal was to establish an outreach to the local business community by way of faculty and student involvement in providing a solid real business solution to a real business need. The plan was to assist the Jonesboro Central Planning Association in accomplishing their goal of establishing a web presence by means of conducting the following:

- (1) The graduate level course MIS6463 Information Systems Analysis and Design taught by Mr. Henry Torres would assemble a team of four to five students to conduct the systems analysis and design phase of the web portal.
- (2) The team would be responsible for conducting interviews with the association members and conducting research for the best practices used in developing this type of portal.
- (3) The team would also establish a forecasted timeline and schedule for the system development life cycle (SDLC).
- (4) The team would create the Request for Proposal (RFP) as a final deliverable that would include detailed screen designs and layouts of all the features to be included in the portal.
- (5) A final report and presentation detailing the analysis and the design steps taken to accomplish the RFP would be done for a major portion of the grade in the course.
- (6) Mr. Torres' – faculty - involvement would be incorporated throughout the project and will continue beyond to include supporting the association with managing the RFP mailing, RFP submittal, review and analysis, and final company selection and recommendation for creating and implementing the portal. Mr. Torres would continue to provide support as technical liaison for the association through the launch of the portal.
- (7) The ultimate goal was to provide the funding required to create and implement the web portal and provide hosting costs for the first year of use.

METHODOLOGY

Real application of the systems analysis and design fundamentals was applied in this project. The student team accomplished the project by faculty supervised use of the principles taught in the coursework of this graduate level class. The project resulted in using practical systems analysis and systems design methodology that can be transferred to the student's portfolio and resume for future career placement.

PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

When the above project was fully implemented, it provided the following benefits:

A. Student Involvement: Graduate students gained a real life experience in transferring learned technology principals to a real world business solution and need.

B. Academic Offering: This was the first of what is planned to be many future real world projects that can be delivered to local business and area industry in this type of academic setting. Mr. Torres plans on constructing a new course and academic outline to market to local entities to help create the scope of projects that can be given to more than one team during a semester long course. In addition modular work may exist and present itself where projects can be carried over to subsequent semesters in the same or related coursework where phase completions could be submitted at the end of semesters.

C. Scholarly Academic Advancement: This project has potential to provide cross country academic recognition to Arkansas State University and the Horizon Institute of Technology by way of laying a foundation for Mr. Torres to develop and publish the process and results that can be used throughout the country in academic institutions, thus advancing the body of knowledge concerning IT resource management.

D. Value added for the Company and/or Community: This type of project work provides value to the company and/or community by providing a supervised project that can be completed in a relatively short timeframe with little to no costs to them. It becomes an outreach and extension service to the local business community provided by the Arkansas State University College of Business and the Horizon Institute of Technology.

SCHEDULE AND BUDGET

Three phases to this project were completed. Phase I had student and faculty involvement while the subsequent two phases only involved the faculty involvement of Mr. Torres.

The cost of constructing and launching the web portal was \$5500 - \$7000 with the overall project costs of \$8800.

A summary of the detail in each phase of the budget follows in the Table 1 below.

The website was designed and launched successfully and can be viewed at www.downtownjonesboro.org

REFERENCES

- Hoffer, Jeffrey, A., George, Joey, F., Valacich, Joseph S., 2002. *Modern Systems Analysis and Design – 3rd ed.*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, Prentice Hall
- McLeod, Raymond, Jr., Jordan, Eleanor, 2002, *Systems Development – A Project Management Approach.*, New York, New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Leyh Publishing.

Table 1: Summary of Schedule and Budget

Activity	Individual(s)	Cost
Phase I: Work from Mid-January through the End of April includes student and faculty work towards delivering the RFP.	Students Faculty JCPA	0 - N/A
Phase II: Work from Mid-May through mid-July includes assisting in mailing, reviewing, and analyzing the RFP, then on to selection of the best technology vendor.	Students Faculty JCPA	
Phase III: Work consists of assisting the downtown association by providing experienced supervision of the technical project work from the end of July through the final implementation and launch of the web portal.	Faculty JCPA	Web development Vendor = \$5500 - \$7000 Desk top PC and printer purchase for the Downtown Association = up to \$1800
**Phases II & III: During these phases Mr. Torres will expand the business contacts for possible future projects and will document the scope of the projects to assure they can be completed in Fall and Spring course offerings.	Faculty	
**Publishing Development: Mr. Torres will document this project and the process used to accomplish it as foundation for a publication that will provide both recognition for ASU/HIT, and academic scholarly advancement.	Faculty	

Authors' Index

Torres, H 1