

Request for proposal
NextBillion.net website overhaul
www.nextbillion.net

NextBillion.net is accepting proposals for the redesign and development of its website (www.nextbillion.net). The purpose of this RFP is to provide a fair evaluation for all candidates and to provide candidates with the evaluation criteria against which they will be judged.

The existing NextBillion.net site was originally designed and produced in 2005 by the World Resources Institute (WRI). As of 2008, it is co-owned and co-managed by WRI and Acumen Fund (AF), who jointly maintain the site with in-house resources.

Organizational overview

The World Resources Institute is an environmental think tank that goes beyond research to find practical ways to protect the earth and improve people's lives. Our mission is to move human society to live in ways that protect Earth's environment and its capacity to provide for the needs and aspirations of current and future generations. Because people are inspired by ideas, empowered by knowledge, and moved to change by greater understanding, WRI provides—and helps other institutions provide—objective information and practical proposals for policy and institutional change that will foster environmentally sound, socially equitable development.

Acumen Fund is a nonprofit venture fund that seeks to prove that small amounts of philanthropic capital, combined with large doses of business acumen, can build thriving enterprises that serve vast numbers of the poor. The fund's investments focus on delivering affordable, critical goods and services—like health, water and housing—through innovative, market-oriented approaches. Over the past five years, Acumen Fund has collected charitable donations from people across the world. It has then turned around and invested equity and loans in both for-profit and nonprofit enterprises that have enabled millions to access basic goods and services in Africa and South Asia. The companies Acumen Fund has supported have created thousands of jobs along the way – and it has begun to extract important lessons for how best to reach the poor.

Project overview

NextBillion.net is a website and blog dedicated to promoting the development and implementation of business strategies that open opportunities and improve quality of life for the world's four billion low-income producers and consumers. By stimulating discussion, raising awareness, and providing a platform for sharing of ideas, NextBillion.net is growing a community of practitioners, academics, entrepreneurs, and business leaders that are promoting business approaches to poverty alleviation. The site provides news, a discussion forum, networking space and a knowledge base for individuals and organizations interested in the "next billion" – the next billion people to rise from the base of the economic pyramid (BoP), and the next billion in profits for businesses that strive to fill market gaps by integrating the BoP into healthy and sustainable economies.

The site emerged from the success of "Eradicating Poverty Through Profit: Making Business Work for the Poor," a WRI conference held December 12-14, 2004 in San Francisco, California. With the success of the event, WRI recognized a new economic development paradigm growing but realized that there was a need for more information, knowledge, and discussion to better define and promote the movement. In May 2005, NextBillion.net was formed as an online space for these stakeholders to hear about the latest trends and developments about the BoP field, as well as dialogue about innovative business models and best practices for reaching the BoP. We have evolved to become a weblog, newsroom, database and resource center – all dedicated solely to exploring base of the pyramid approaches to persistent poverty and environmental degradation.

As the site has grown, so has BoP activity. NextBillion.net has undoubtedly played a role in helping these ideas reach a wider audience. The website has received major media coverage from sources as diverse as the Washington Post, Businessweek, and Foreign Policy magazine. NextBillion.net was also named one of the "Best of the New Web" by BusinessWeek in 2006, while the Webby Awards named it a finalist in the category of "Best Blog: Business" that same year.

This growing BoP awareness led by NextBillion.net is also reflected in the site's rising traffic. In 2007, more than 2 million unique visitors came to the site and generated nearly 47 million hits. More than 1,400 readers have subscribed to NextBillion.net's RSS feeds, generating another 500,000 unique visits per year.

WRI and AF recognize that in order to maintain the status of NextBillion.net as a leading source of BoP information and dialogue, the partners must take measures to solidify the relationship of the site with its heavily engaged "super-users" and expand its readership base among visitors who have a more casual interest in BoP issues. To accomplish

these goals, WRI and AF are redesigning NextBillion.net with four objectives in mind:

- Trim down some existing features and streamline design to make the site more user-friendly and accessible to visitors.
- Add new features that enhance users' ability to access and distribute content without "cluttering" the site unnecessarily.
- Create some flexibility to explore the potential for NextBillion.net to become more of an online community, preferably through relying on existing social networking sites and technology.
- Improve the "back end" so that NextBillion.net staff can more efficiently post content and multimedia and so users can easily post comments.

Audiences

The redesigned NextBillion.net should balance the needs of two categories of visitor:

- Super-users: Visitors that are knowledgeable on BoP issues, that visit NextBillion.net or read its RSS Feed on a regular basis, that may comment regularly and send story suggestions and are generally looking for a very substantive BoP discussion.
- Casual/New Users: Visitors who may have come upon the site through a related Google search or link, who are searching for information about a specific subject or who may have heard of the site through the media/blogosphere – these users may have a general interest in poverty issues, but little or no knowledge of BoP ideas in particular.

The site should be designed to appeal to new users with its simplicity and make it easy for them to find the specific information they are looking for as well as learn more about BoP issues. The site should at the same time allow super-users to easily stay on top of the latest NextBillion.net updates, comment/contribute and share content with friends and colleagues.

Business goals

NextBillion.net's goal is to be the web destination for those interested in "base of the pyramid" approaches to poverty and environmental degradation. The site promotes the creation and dissemination of ideas, models and discussions around BoP issues in service of that goal. As such, we hope that the redesign of the website will:

- Increase the audience for the website and blog, especially repeat visitors
- Simplify navigation so that users can easily access information
- Streamline day-to-day tasks for NextBillion.net staff including posting blogs, news, events and managing comments
- Encourage visitors searching for particular information to explore new areas of the site
- Update the look and brand of the site to reflect the new partnership between WRI and Acumen Fund

Scope of work

Design requirements

The design should bring a cleaner look to the NextBillion.net homepage, giving it a more simple but powerful visual effect, and an identity that reflects the partnership of WRI and Acumen Fund. The homepage should also include imagery of people at the base of the economic pyramid in some form. The "real estate" of each page should remain as uncluttered as possible.

As part of the scope of this work, the NextBillion.net team would like a distinct brand/image for the site to be developed that will mold elements of the World Resources Institute brand and the Acumen Fund brand. Design changes will incorporate this rebranding effort.

Technical infrastructure requirements

We will look to the vendor to specify which hardware, software and programming setups, and CMS are best suited to our needs. Our existing website runs on Drupal version 4.7, but we are not tied to that platform by any means.

User requirements

In general, it should be kept in mind that some of our users may be accessing the site through a slower connection. As such, reliance on Flash and Javascript should be minimal, and for the content that does use these technologies, there must be alternate content provided when the Flash plugin is missing or JavaScript is disabled. The main navigation scheme should not be implemented in Flash. The website solution should be robust and must be supported on Internet Explorer 5.5+, Firefox 1.0+ and Safari 2.0 at a minimum.

Content Creation/Integration

NextBillion.net staff need to be able to quickly and easily post content from YouTube/Vimeo, Flickr/Picasa, and other content-sharing sites as well as post relevant news and events from other sources – the latter may require integration with Google Reader, del.icio.us and/or other tagging tools to streamline the posting process. The site should also be structured to allow for low-intensity integration with social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn to determine the viability of future larger-scale integration.

Functionality/programming requirements

A key goal of the web redesign is to make the site more dynamic and site content easier to update. In addition to our current features, some of the specific new features we are thinking about incorporating into our site include:

- Unmoderated (spam-free) commenting and author notification of new comments
- Updated RSS feed
- New content sharing capabilities (Facebook, Reddit, Stumbleupon and others)
- Improved popularity block (most viewed, most commented, most shared, etc.)
- Light social networking integration (see above)
- Improved staff profile posting and management
- Free tagging to replace current taxonomy – tag cloud on home page
- Google Reader and/or del.icio.us integration for NextBillion.net staff
- Video (YouTube/Vimeo, etc) and photo (Flickr/Picasa, etc.) integration
- Improved WYSIWYG editor or other, easy-to-use content management system
- Newsletter integration with Convio/GetActive/Raiser's Edge/etc.
- Events page integration with iCal and/or Google Calendar format

Please see Appendix 1 for more examples of specific site features we have highlighted from other websites to serve as a reference for this project.

Content

Additional content is currently housed in the Resources (www.nextbillion.net/resources) and Activity Database (www.nextbillion.net/activitycapsule) sections of NextBillion.net.

Activity Database: We will no longer be actively maintaining the Activity Database and would like to archive its current contents in the redesign. This will ensure that old links to Database content will remain active but allow us to refocus new site content to the Resources section.

Resources: This section should be redesigned to fit all of the content on one page, ordered alphabetically or chronologically. We would like to create a template for quickly and easily adding new reports/publications/PowerPoint presentations, etc to this database in an efficient and uniform manner. This template should include file attachment capabilities.

Timing

NextBillion.net should be redesigned and relaunched on or before October 15th, 2008.

Proposal format

Proposals should contain the following sections:

- Executive Summary containing a brief description of your project development approach and costs
- Company profile
- Qualifications, including previous clients with contact information and relevant URLs
- A description of your development process
- Asset and draft delivery methods
- Project stages and milestones
- The proposed team and their qualifications
- Proposed schedule
- Detailed breakdown of services and costs both BEFORE and AFTER launch date
- Clarity around what documentation and training will be provided as part of the deliverable
- Costs and payment details
- Terms and conditions

Evaluation Criteria

Deliver proposals to the attention (email preferred) of:

Robert Katz
Acumen Fund
76 Ninth Avenue, Suite 315
New York, NY 10011
rkatz@acumenfund.org

Francisco Noguera
World Resources Institute
10 G Street, NW Suite 800
Washington, DC 20002
fnoguera@wri.org

Proposals will be evaluated with the following criteria:

- Suitability of the proposal – The proposed solution meets the needs and criteria set forth in the RFP.
- Expertise in recommending and communicating appropriate technical and aesthetic solutions as evidenced by the proposal and references.
- Aesthetic capabilities – Prior work demonstrates artistic and innovative user-friendly interfaces that engage users.
- Candidate experience – Candidate has successfully completed similar projects and has the qualifications necessary to undertake this project.
- Depth and breadth of team
- Value – The price is commensurate with value offered by the proposer. As non-profit institutions, WRI and AF are able to accept pro bono service and recognize the provider to the full extent allowed by the Internal Revenue Service, including naming the proposer in WRI/AF collateral as a pro bono partner.
- Proposal presentation – The information is presented in a clear, logical manner and is well organized.
- Price

- Quality of proposed technology platforms

For questions, please contact Francisco Noguera or Robert Katz directly.

Appendix 1

Following are some examples of "good practices" on various items related to NextBillion.net's redesign. This section is the result of an internal brainstorming session among NextBillion.net staff and should serve as a reference during the redesign project.

Email a friend

Cleantech blog (blogger): <http://www.blogger.com/email-post.g?blogID=16432059&postID=63099518545278922>
It happens in-browser rather than loading your email.

WorldChanging: <http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/007986.html>
Email a friend is on the post itself, no need to link.

TechCrunch: <http://www.techcrunch.com/>

Best: You can email from a "share" button that includes facebook, digg, etc. very small and easy to use. Potential downside: not good for slow connections?

Popularity Block

Huffington Post: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>
Has a pictorial and flashy block. But may be too slow to load and too cluttery.

WashingtonPost: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/most-popular.html?hpid=hcmodule>
They have most viewed, most emailed, most commented on and most viewed galleries. We would like to consider having a "most commented on" section in NextBillion.net.

NYT: <http://www.nytimes.com/>
It is good that this popularity block is tabbed, like in NextBillion.net. We should keep it that way.

Social Networking

SavageMinds: <http://savageminds.org/>
Their Facebook integration is straightforward, it's just a link in the sidebar.

Here's the FB group site: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2408714386>
As you know, you can create discussions, add news, etc. This might be a useful space to host forums. Can create a Facebook "page" be created as the NYT has? <http://www.facebook.com/nytimes?ref=s>

Ning is also something we could have a badge for in NB's sidebar. An advantage over Facebook is that anyone can access this, not just FB users.

Commenting

Guy Kawasaki's blog (blog.guykawasaki.com) allows for live commenting. Users can moderate the comments themselves and rate blog posts in a five star scale, thus allowing for a better popularity ranking, not only in terms of hits but also of ratings showing the number of votes associated. All of these services are part of JS Kit, which looks easy to use under any platform. <http://js-kit.com/comments/>

Profiling

Duarte (Duarte.com). It has an interesting format for user profiling, especially in terms of its visual presentation and the Q&A on the left of each picture as a means to introduce staff writers.

Treehugger.com I like the visual consistency of the section (all good photos in black and white, well distributed. I also like the tone of the introduction... not too formal but giving the right info.

Tagging

Clouds like the one on the bottom right hand corner at <http://blog.ted.com/>.