

CATFISH CONNECTION

CATEGORIES

SALE ITEMS

NEW ITEMS

- "CLOSE OUTS"

- ORDER A CATALOG

COPIES

AND CALENDARS

ITEMS

ITEMS

ITEMS

WORMS

LEAZE BAIT

BAITS

/CAPS

MOLDS

FEATURED ITEMS



AG6500BC

ABU GARCIA 6500TCCF BLACK

CAT NEW 2019

\$109.95

CASE STUDY

SMALL BUT MIGHTY E-COMMERCE SITE RANKS #2 IN GOOGLE SEARCH

CUSTOMER

Catfish Connection

WEBSITE

CatfishConnection.com

INDUSTRY

E-Commerce



CUSTOMER

Catfish Connection

WEBSITE

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CUSTOMER PROFILE

Catfish people are different from bass people, as Janet Downs, co-owner of catfishconnection.com explains. Bass fishermen look for more high-end accessories, while catfish anglers are pleased with simple rods and reels.

You'll find that same simplicity in catfishconnection.com, an e-commerce store that supplies tackle to catfish and crappie fishermen. The company, located in Pana, Illinois, was founded in 1995 as a new innovative website.


The website lives up to the tagline, "We sell everything but the fish!" The inventory includes gill nets and all types of bait, jig molds, six kinds of minnow buckets, five different kinds of twine, and nearly two dozen varieties of sinkers and sliders.

Owners-Operators John and Janet Downs bought the business from family in 1989. Today, John, a CPA, and Janet, a registered nurse, operate their business full time with five other employees. "Our goal is to deliver good services at a competitive price," Janet says.



PRODUCT IMPLEMENTED





Fishing is big business! According to the 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, US fishing nets \$50 billion in retail sales. That leads to a \$125 billion impact on the nation's economy. **This is the story of one small but mighty company in Pana, Illinois, that is reeling in a bite of the industry, selling recreational catfishing supplies.**

The Business of Recreational Catfishing

Like all of today's businesses, multiple factors contribute to success, Janet says. "For example, when troops were deployed, we saw a decrease in sales; when unemployment is high, we see an increase in sales. The ongoing government import tariffs have decreased our sales at this point, and changing weather always plays a major role."

What has remained constant is the need for an effective website. For the first 10 years that the Downses owned the business, Catfish Connection sold supplies from their walk-in store hand writing their invoices..

As they transitioned to paperless bookkeeping, the couple realized that their sales strategy also needed to transition to computers, and they could upscale the business by taking their products online. They worked with a small firm in St. Louis to establish a simple website presence in 1997.

As the years passed, the couple began seeing the growing potential of e-commerce for CatfishConnection.com. They also realized that many of their customers – especially younger ones – were looking to buy supplies directly from their digital device.

Problem: Old Website is Weak Bait

Customers complained the site was outdated and not functional with newer devices. "The old website was a dinosaur," Janet says. "In the beginning it was new and not user friendly."

"People were calling constantly saying, 'I can't buy on the site; it's too small to see it on my phone,'" Janet recalls.

The small web company that built the first iteration of Catfish Connection didn't have the staff or resources to quickly respond to client needs. "It would take weeks to make a change," Janet remembers.

That web company also didn't possess the ability to modify the website for mobile users. Mobile sites need a developer's strong technical skill for back-end development as well as design and user experience expertise for front-end usability. Their first web company was out.

John and Janet knew they needed a more robust website, and now they were without a website company partner. Janet knew they couldn't do it themselves.

"When it comes to building a website, I don't have the knowledge to do any of it. And as the owner and the operator of catfishconnection.com, I don't have any time to do it."

She looked online for options and "couldn't make heads or tails of anything."

One day, Janet was talking with an IT professional who was upgrading their inventory program. Janet mentioned they were looking for a website design company. "He recommended LRS Web Solutions. We wanted to go with a company with a good reputation. LRS has a great reputation of getting great work done. We wanted our website to shine."

PROBLEM

Old website

PROBLEM

Not mobile friendly

PROBLEM

Long waits for changes

RESULT

Top search engine rankings

RESULT

99/100 usability score

RESULT

LRS WebSolutions' Helpdesk gives prompt service

The LRS Antilles Content Manager Solution

John and Janet acknowledge that the notion of selling fishing supplies doesn't exactly lend itself to grand visions of great success. When Janet called LRS Web Solutions' senior sales representative Katie Hahn, "I didn't think she'd take me seriously." But LRS Web Solutions' mission is to help businesses of any size—even ones selling squirmy worms and shad trawls.

What is a shad trawl? We didn't know either. Check out catfishconnection.com to find out.

At LRS Web Solutions, we don't know a shad trawl from a jig head. But we work to understand our customer's needs as well as the needs of our customer's customers, and we build a website that extends their business in a functional and fashionable way.

In the case of Catfish Connection, the site needed an upgraded that retained the image of the modest company and fit the unassuming character of catfishermen: simple, plain, user-friendly with no frills. It needed a responsive design that works well on mobile devices and a robust, reliable e-commerce component. Nearly 90 percent of Catfish Connection users are accessing the site from a mobile device—on the water, perhaps?

LRS Web Solutions' mission is to help businesses of any size—even ones selling squirmy worms and shad trawls.



The New CatfishConnection.com

LRS Web Solutions redesigned the e-commerce site using LRS Antilles Content Manager at the end of the 2016 catfish season.

The new, clean, straightforward website catalogs over 8,000 products, including nearly 40 kinds of reels. Two Swedish designs, exclusive to Catfish Connection, sell approximately 800 reels a year. Catfish Connection could be the Bass Pro of the catfish supplies industry.

Catfish Connection is a great example of a site that matches the buyer personas of catfish anglers, who may be retirees, truck drivers, or other workers. The site is simple color photos, straightforward descriptions and no “fluff.” “Our customers like the simplicity of the site,” Janet says. “They don’t need a lot of videos and other flashy things.” They just need the gear. The Catfish Connection printed catalog is black and white. It’s available for download at the site as a PDF but also still printed and available upon request.

“The new website flows easily, customers can find what they need, and we can easily tweak the menu,”

Janet says. Their site is so streamlined, the staff don’t have to attend to it every day.

“LRS improved what we already had,” John adds. “We need LRS to float us forward.”

Janet agrees. “The site runs more smoothly than it did before. When we have a problem or a request, LRS’s HelpDesk is fast and gets right on it. I love that.”

The sales are holding steady and riding with the times. Changing employment rates, import tariffs, and then there’s what John calls “the Amazon phenomena. We’re losing some business because of that. But we know how to hunker down.”

With a simple and flexible website, Catfish Connection is in a great position to continue to evolve to meet the needs of the customers, the owners and the shifting industry.

“A lot of the mom-and-pop shops we deliver to are closing down, so that means our website is getting more important to our business,” John says. “LRS helped us take a big leap to where we wanted to go.”

“The site runs more smoothly than it did before. When we have a problem or a request, **LRS’s HelpDesk is fast and gets right on it.** I love that.”

/// JANET DOWNS

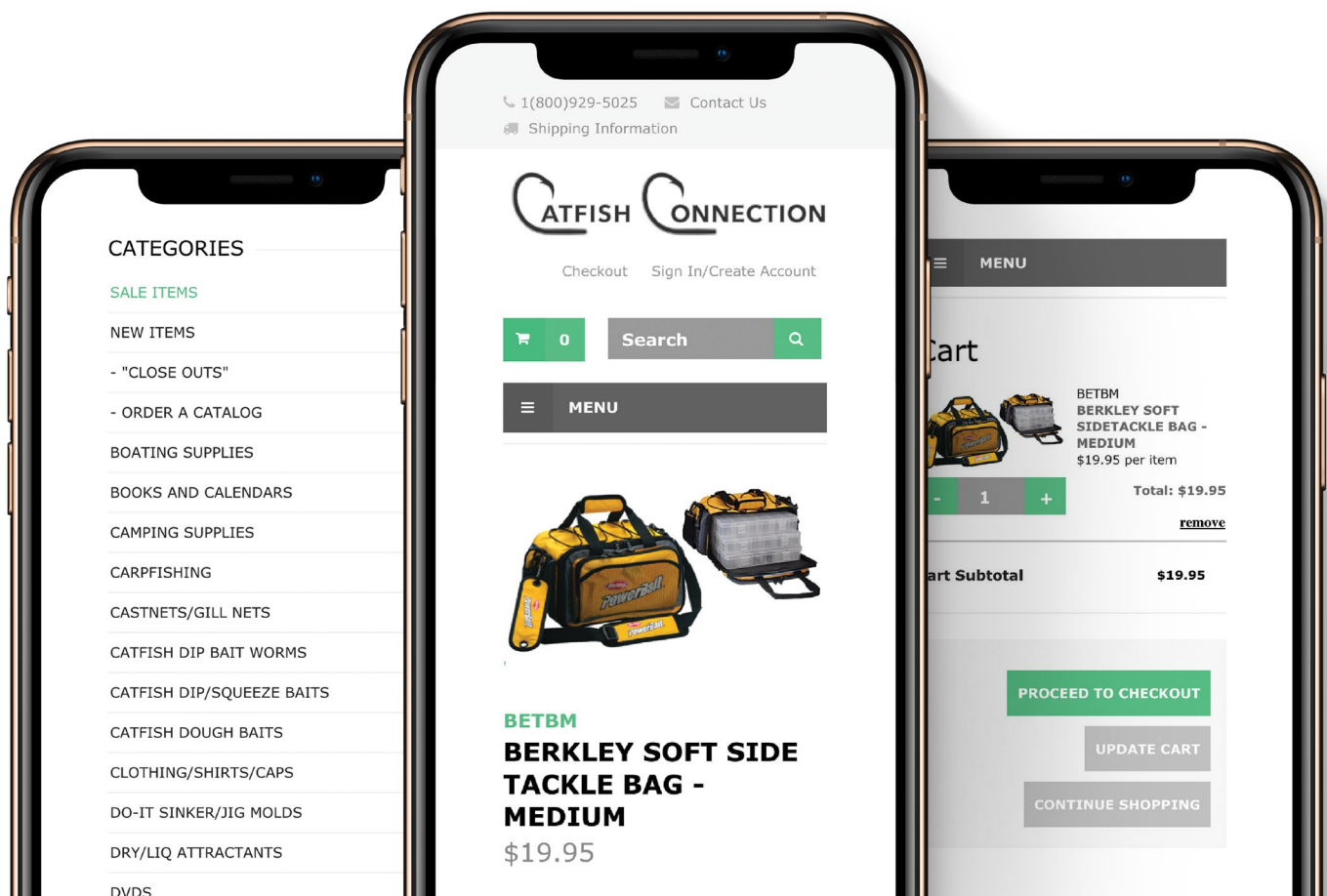
Reeling in Rankings

As an e-commerce site, Catfish Connection definitely connects with its customers. It ranks #2 on Google for the search “catfish supplies” and #1 on Bing—a remarkable feat when your competitors are Cabela, Bass Pro, and Walmart.

To keep reeling in customers, LRS Web Solutions is helping the company with new bait such as an email contact form, a newsletter, a wish list option and product reviews. Janet says they also plan to tackle their Facebook page with more posts and photos.

While some of their customers still don't have computers or smartphones, catfishconnection.com is ready when they leap into the digital waters. Similarly, LRS Web Solutions is ready to implement any needed updates this small but mighty company in Pana, Illinois needs—when they are ready.

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ABOUT LRS WEB SOLUTIONS

Founded in 1996 as a division of Levi, Ray & Shoup, Inc., LRS Web Solutions provides custom web design and development services to help customers achieve business success. Based in Springfield, Illinois, LRS Web Solutions employs a team of nearly thirty specialists in the areas of web design, web application development, content management systems, mobile apps, search engine optimization, website hosting, graphic design, audio and video production, and network support.

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