



CASE STUDY

“WE NEEDED THE COMPANY TO DO EVERYTHING”

LRS WEB SOLUTIONS DELIVERS MULTI-SITE INTEGRATION AND CUSTOM-CRAFTED EXTRAS

CUSTOMER

Christian Retreats Network

WEBSITE

ChristianRetreatsNetwork.org
+ 9 location websites

INDUSTRY

Event Planning



CUSTOMER PROFILE

CRN is a Growing Network of Independent Off-Site Ministries.

Based out of Lake Williamson in Carlinville, Illinois, Christian Retreats Network (CRN) is a system of 8 independent retreat centers that host events for off-site Christian ministry.

With messages of "Restore. Renew. Reconnect" and "Escape. Explore. Enjoy," the sites offer lodging, dining, recreation activities, and meeting rooms. CRN started with Faholo Conference Center in Michigan and gradually has formed a network of nearly a dozen properties in the Midwest and beyond.

CRN formally partners with the properties, and the properties operate independently. The partnership agreement includes unified branding and marketing, including website design. "At CRN, our promise is that we partner with you; we'll help you. The website has been a huge part of that, since people don't have to come up with a plan from scratch," says Ashley Haschemeyer, marketing manager for CRN.

CRN identifies its website user generally as three different types of seasonal event planners.

During the summer season, youth camps are popular. Youth pastors and managers of non-profits are the event planners. These are young, tech-savvy people who are comfortable with technology.

During the other seasons, event planners are coordinating church retreats. These users tend to be older pastors or adult volunteers planning events in their spare time. These users may not be as comfortable with technology and need an easy path and intuitive functionality.

A third identified demographic are educators planning events during the school season. These users need fast and easy access and the ability to multi-step the planning process over time as they squeeze it in after work.

Regardless of the type of event planner, "Everybody's held to high standards to provide great service and great amenities to represent the CRN brand," Ashley says.

CUSTOMER

Christian Retreats Network

WEBSITE

ChristianRetreatsNetwork.org

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PRODUCT IMPLEMENTED



A Common Struggle: Online Presence

In addition to common services, common users and a common Christian mission, the sites also had a common struggle: to maintain high-quality, consistent branding and unified marketing of the sites.

"Once the groups are on the site, the administrators do a great job of serving the groups and doing the activities. The problem is getting them there. The sales and marketing needed help," says Ashley.

Once the sites joined the network, the CRN staff created a website for each property using Joomla. Ashley, along with Kayla Crawford, content manager, maintained the content and also the technical aspects of the sites. As more sites joined CRN, their task grew like a congregation on Christmas Day. In 2015, the sites moved to WordPress—but instead of helping the sites, website maintenance became even more complicated, confusing, and clumsy—and website performance worsened.

Problems:
Marketing,
Branding &
Website
Performance

We All Fall Down

"Over the next 2 years, we struggled to keep the websites up," Ashley recalls. "About once a month we would have an afternoon where websites would be down because of WordPress. Overall, WordPress is flexible, but we had so many plugins, that if one plugin updated, it could break another one. We paid one vendor for server space, another for backups, and had more fees. We were paying about six different companies to make sure our website stays up. One glitch, and they would all go down."

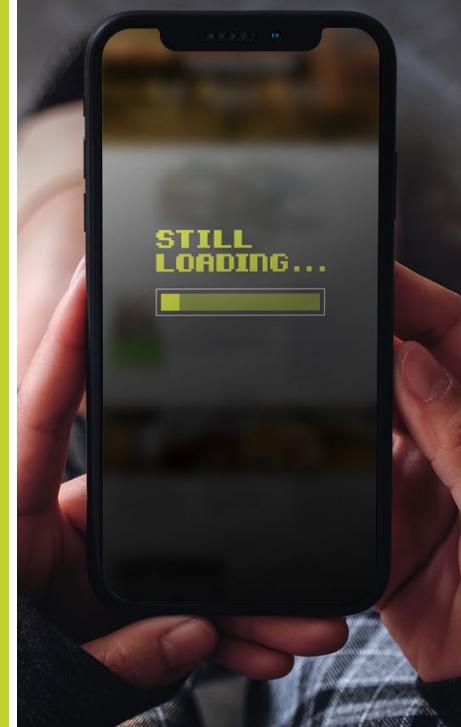
Ashley remembers that event planners would call her with the problems. "Somebody would call in—and tell us that the site was down—again—and they couldn't upload a form. It was very frustrating."

The sites also were not mobile friendly at all. "When some sites loaded, the logo would be huge."

Because of the hosting and WordPress, the websites were extremely slow and borderline unusable. Pages took between 19–30 seconds to load. This caused a lot of frustration with both the staff and their customers.

Kayla would dedicate an estimated one-third of her day just to troubleshooting the website. "She would come in every day knowing that she would have to work on the technical problems with her site," Ashley says. Her productivity suffered.

Problems:
Website Downtime,
No Mobile
Friendliness;
Slow-Loading Sites



'Enough is Enough'

Needed:
Company that can handle multiple websites, integrate with CRM, Troubleshoot

By 2017, Ashley had her epiphany. "I finally said, 'Enough is enough.' She appealed to CRN's director, Steve Evans, and stated her case.

"I told him that our website is not just for informational purposes—people are 'shopping' for a retreat site. They're going to find out who we are, submit proposals, and ask questions. If our websites are down, we could miss an opportunity." Some proposals result in multi-year contracts, so the revenue lost can easily skyrocket to tens of thousands of dollars. "These are planners who are planning \$10,000–\$50,000 events—you miss one person you miss out on a lot of revenue."

Ashley understood that the websites reflected the CRN brand. "The CRN tagline is, 'We're your experts in offsite planning!' But if we don't have websites that work, we don't look like the experts."

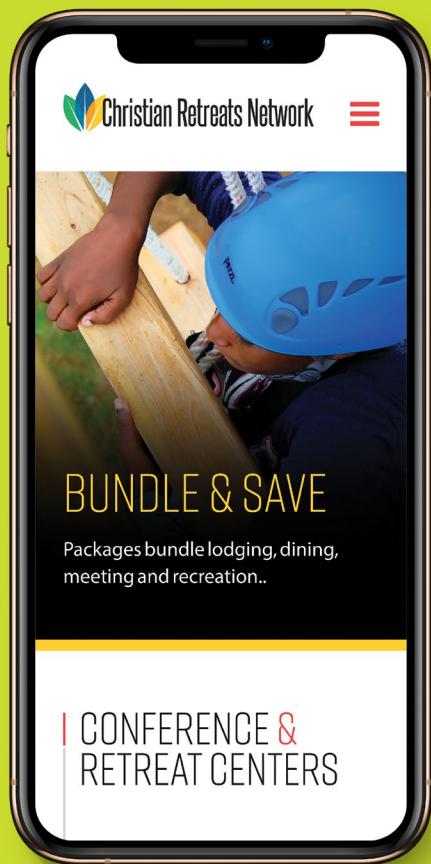
**"If we don't have websites that work,
we don't look like experts."**

/// ASHLEY HASCHEMEYER

Needed: Expert Web Solutions that “Can Do Everything.”

With a small staff and a Goliath of a project, CRN needed a highly skilled and reliable team of experts in development, design, and project management. "We needed the company to do everything," Ashley says. "We asked companies up front—'Can you handle it?' Most said no."

Two big pieces that eliminated many website companies were the need to build a customized event-planning module and integrating the Content Management System with CRN's Customer Relationship Management software. "We also wanted expertise to troubleshoot for us and fix the problems quickly and without hassle on our end. LRS was able to do all of these things for us, and do them well," Ashley says.



LRS ANSWERS THE CALL

LRS Web Solutions: The Solution for Multiple Site Integration & More

Choosing LRS Web Solutions, the CRN sites were relieved to have a website partner who could craft a cohesive, complex yet centralized website structure, build modules, and integrate the customer relationship management program. In addition to the technical aspects, LRS Web Solutions' expert designers could design sites that would allow the properties to maintain their own identities but benefit from the collective CRN brand.

LRS Antilles Content Manager easily does all this, providing a centralized solution for web maintenance across the multiple websites for easy management.

And not just websites, but LRS inspected the brand identity overall and gave each site a color as its identifier.

Once launched, the LRS Helpdesk is always available for any questions or concerns.

"Overall, it was a great experience working with the LRS team," Ashley says, adding that Project Manager Joe Shimkus "was always on top of things and very patient with us."

Web Developer Jedd Jones and Erik Johnson were also patient to meet the needs of CRN, Ashley says, training the staff and troubleshooting problems quickly.

Results: "It Feels Good."

The result is a package of 9 websites (and more on the way!) that meet the needs of the CRN team and its broad and diverse customer base.

MOBILE FRIENDLY

Across the sites, mobile accounts for the majority of web traffic. Now that the sites are all mobile-friendly, that number is likely to increase as their customer base returns.

STABLE WEBSITE

Kayla now doesn't have to spend her days monitoring the websites, fixing the code, and reacting to down time. LRS Web Solutions maintains a solid uptime of 99%+. "Now she doesn't waste her time monitoring and can spend her time on other projects," Ashley says.

SITE SPEED

In December 2018, CRN's average load time was a mind-blowing 31.5 seconds. Replacing WordPress with LRS Antilles CMS, the load time improved 78%.

DESIGN

Ashley and the team like the stacked layout style, the large photographs, and consistent branding. "The sites are trendy and modern. They feel good." The sites also use authentic photographs of real customers enjoying the properties.

HELPDESK

LRS Web Solutions' work doesn't stop at the go-live date. Helpdesk is available via email or telephone. "Any problem I submit, within a day it's fixed or in the works," Ashley reports.

Modules Made-to-Order

Two modules were designed and built to CRN's specifications. The Lead Tracking and Planner Central modules have streamlined processes for event planners and administrators. "They have been very successful for us," Ashley says.

LEAD TRACKING

The LRS Web Solutions team built a module to tag specific website searches as qualified leads. CRN specifies certain keywords for various campaigns, and when users type that specific query, the module is alerted and records that user's journey through the site, including the date and time of the interaction. This allows CRN to measure digital advertising and email campaigns. They can track each with an individual ID and sort by date.

As far as lead generation, since the sites relaunched in summer 2018, Ashley reports that every property has more website leads in 2019 compared to 2018. Comparing the first half of 2019 to the latter half of 2018, users have increased 230 percent. "Because the websites were up and functional, people are able to submit their leads," Ashley says.

BRAND-BUILDING

The websites are also helping brand CRN as the go-to expert/thought leader for Christian event planning. Ashley says that other organizations are reaching out to them, looking for an expert to counsel them on best practices.

"They realize we are a network with the same struggles that they have." Ashley says that some sites have found them online and inquired to "talk shop" and get some best practice advice. Right now, these are side conversations and informal consultations, but it illustrates how a company's online presence influences its brand reputation.

PLANNER CENTRAL

Event planning is all about the details. The LRS team built a custom module to create CRN's multi-step, event planning database. Called Planner Central, the database organizes hundreds of variables for CRN's multiple locations—all in one system.

Centralized information allows users to easily add the dozens of details needed to make the event run smoothly, including the various recreation activities, from bonfires to boating. Some activities require an adult, some may not. Selecting these varied options is one-click easy. Administrators can maintain consistent messaging and associate documents with each step of the form.

Planner Central also integrates with CRN's customer relationships management platform, allowing personalized messages for new and returning users that match their stage in the booking their location of choice, and other variables.

"The old system had trouble updating content and the webpage often would not load for users," Ashley says. "With the new LRS system, we simplified and combined the two concepts into one web page. LRS designed it in a way that is functional and pretty."



What's Next

As the CRN team enjoys the stability and functionality of their new sites, which launched in 2018, new partners are coming on board. South Dakota and Nebraska are joining the network, expanding the CRN reach beyond the Midwest to the Great Plains. A site in South Texas has inquired, Ashley says, and expansion to the West coast is on the horizon. "If this keeps up, we'll be a coast-to-coast network!"

Expansion is easy with LRS Antilles CMS. With a few simple clicks, LRS Antilles can easily add new domains that incorporate existing design and features.

CRN content is constantly being updated, and they'd like to start a community page in 2020, adding testimonials and stories from campers and volunteers. LRS will work with them on these enhancements and improvements to Planner Central and Lead Tracking. LRS Antilles Content Manager can easily adapt to this need and develop any future need the growing CRN network presents. After all, we think of ourselves as their partners, too.

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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