



BIGFORKWEB BUILDS SITES AND SERVES THE COMMUNITY

## Beating the Recession by Giving Back

By Eliz Harrison, 6-24-09

**BIGFORK** – In 2003, Mike Callaghan walked into the Bigfork Chamber of Commerce and set the tone for his start-up Web development company.

Now a thriving business with seven employees and more than 350 clients, BigforkWEB Development owes some of its early success to Callaghan's dedication to community involvement.

"I think it's important to give back – this company's been very fortunate," he said.

Whether it's attending local Rotary Club meetings, decorating downtown Bigfork for the holidays or picking up trash along Highway 35, all of BigforkWEB's employees are involved in the Flathead Valley community outside of work.



Caption: Jana Primmer works in her office at BigforkWEB Development. Primmer is the project manager for the growing Bigfork company. - Lido Vizzutti/Flathead Beacon

"It's good for people and good for business," Andrea Goff, vice president of operations and a member of the Rotary Club of Bigfork, said.

After growing up in New England and studying Geographic Information Science at the University of Colorado – Boulder, Callaghan moved to Jackson, Wyo., and started a computer software company. It was in this small town that he developed his business strategy of engaging the local community. He became a member of the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce and also owned a small mountain bike shop.

He later followed the dot-com boom of the 1990s to San Francisco, where he worked as a Web site developer for a financial services company for three years.

When the dot-com bubble burst in the early 2000s, he started looking for places to settle down and start a family. Callaghan said he chose Bigfork for its small-town feel – a decision that has paid off.

After starting out with one client, Bigfork artist Nancy Cawdreay, Callaghan said his company just took off. It worked by referrals only, and didn't begin marketing until the recession hit a year ago.

“Until last year, growth was phenomenal,” Callaghan said. But while business at BigforkWEB has slowed a bit, he said the company is pretty much recession-proof.

“The growth of the Internet hasn’t slowed. Businesses know the need to have a presence online, not only in the Flathead, but throughout the world,” he said. “We are very lucky it hasn’t affected us negatively.”

Callaghan said he and his employees have worked hard to keep up in a down economy, including holding a free monthly panel series at Flathead Valley Community College about utilizing Web sites for businesses.

Goff said after creating a “really, really rockin’ Web site,” start-up Web companies shouldn’t expect business to come to them.

“You have to get out of the office. You can’t just put up a Web site or a sign,” she said. “You have to show them you want their business. Go pound the pavement.”

Located on Highway 35, BigforkWEB tries hard to stay abreast of new technologies.

“We all love technology and read as many books, blogs and newsletters as we can get our hands on to keep up with it,” Creative Director Dani Taylor said. “I don’t mean to sound like a Hallmark commercial here, but we all really love what we do and who we work with.”

Taylor said the company was one of the first in the Flathead area to start formatting Web sites with Cascading Style Sheets, or CSS, an application used to style Web pages written in HTML.

One of Dave Short’s first jobs at BigforkWEB when he arrived a year ago was to modernize the company’s programming.

“It’s nice to be on the front end and be an innovator,” the senior developer said.

BigforkWEB is also unique in that it works with smaller companies with smaller budgets.

“A lot of companies in the area do not want to take on smaller Web sites because the money is in the big clients,” Taylor said.

This is something client Steve Weber knows first-hand from shopping around for a company to help him build his Web site, [speakinggump.com](http://speakinggump.com).

Weber, a Forrest Gump impersonator and keynote speaker living in Hamilton, said a couple of companies declined to work with him before he found BigforkWEB.

“BigforkWEB Development immediately impressed me because while a small company, they are large in terms of Web design companies,” he said. He liked that the company assigned a project manager to centralize communication.

Weber said he also wanted to work with people who “embraced the Montana lifestyle” and who he could meet with face-to-face.

“Looking people in the eye is critical if a personal bond is going to exist,” he said.

Weber said the company spent hours with him, getting to know who he was as an individual, before they began to collaborate on his Web site.

“It’s like building a house when we’re building a Web site – you have to communicate with clients,” Goff said.

Callaghan said it gives him satisfaction to watch a business grow because of his company’s work.

“That’s really how we measure our success,” he said. “Helping small businesses grow and be successful. That’s important to me.” **[End of article]**

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