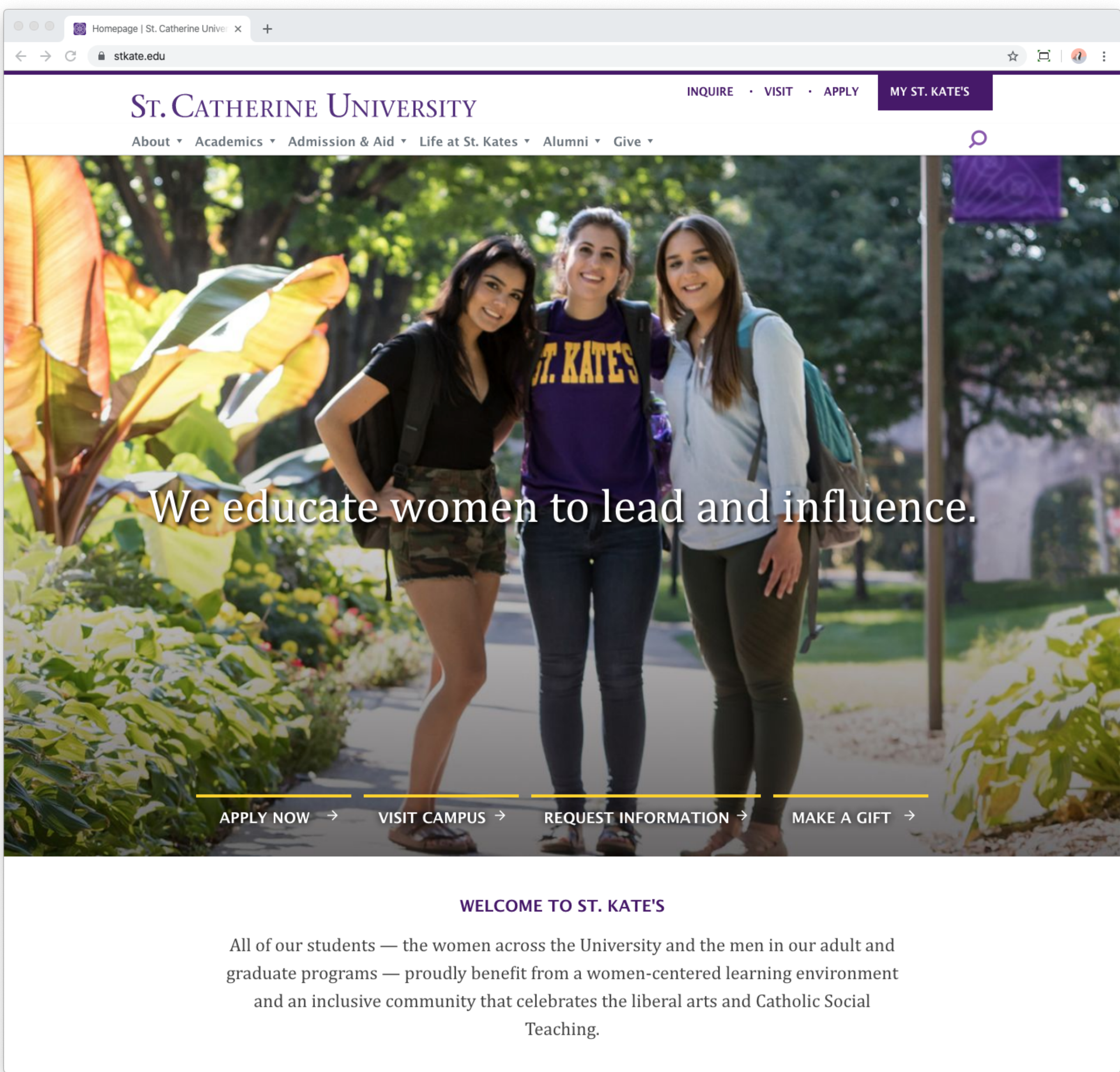# BLOG

Case Study: St. Catherine University

Ivan Stegic — October 31, 2019

ST. KATE'S WEBSITE REDESIGN: A FRESH SITE AND AN EMPOWERED TEAM

St. Catherine University (known as St. Kate's) is a private Catholic liberal arts university in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. St. Kate's was one of the first colleges specifically for women in the Midwest but today also welcomes men into graduate and associate programs. It has a student population of around 5,000 annually and welcomes students of all ethnicities and ages.

St. Kate's website is their biggest marketing tool, and it needs to give site visitors—from prospective students to internal St Kate's workers—a great user experience on desktop and increasingly, on mobile.

One of the biggest issues with the website was that it was effectively two sites, one internal (Kateway) and one external. People didn't always know where to go to find information, and information duplicated in both sites could get out of sync. Beyond that, the search functionality of the site was poor—when users couldn't find what they needed, they resorted to using Google to search the site, or started helpdesk tickets.

But bigger process issues lurked behind the scenes. The site was built on ModX, a content management system that was not supported internally. This required working with an outside vendor when more than simple content updates were needed. In addition, any content updates, regardless of department, had to be approved and made by the Marketing & Communications department, who already had their hands full with their own work, so there was often a backlog of requests.

OUR ASSIGNMENT: BUILD A NEW WEBSITE AND A SELF-SUFFICIENT DEV TEAM

The site redesign had several high-level goals: create a new site in Drupal 8 from the ground up that was more flexible and able to be supported in-house, combine the internal and external sites to one site with a single sign on, and refresh the site design and content to better support more robust marketing efforts. Once the site was supported in-house, it would be easier to implement another goal: share ownership of the site content across campus, instead of under Marketing & Communications.

We spent a great deal of time on the content audit and content strategy on this project, in order to know what content to keep and how to organize old and new content effectively. This process can seem long if you're not used to it, but it's absolutely essential in a site redesign, where we need to tailor content to specific audiences who all need to be communicated to in different ways. St. Kate's really did their due diligence to gather information and ensure all voices were heard; they sent out surveys, did presentations, met with folks. We performed user interviews with all levels of stakeholders and users, from members of the web advisory group to department heads, teachers and students.

We believe in getting stakeholders (IT, marketing and business units) involved as early as possible in the review process, so as soon as we'd constructed the new site's navigation, we tested it with both internal and external audiences and made changes based on those results.

We made the following changes to the St. Kate's site:

- **CMS & Infrastructure:** We moved the site hosting to Pantheon, a development platform tailored for Drupal, which also supports Apache Solr, the solution we implemented to improve St. Kate's search functionality. We also liked that Pantheon's workflow enforces the development > test > live workflow.
- **One Site, Home for All Content:** Instead of the old internal site and the old external site being separate, there is now one integrated site with a single sign-on. All content can be reached from the home page.
- **Content Migration and Streamlining:** Most of the content had to be recreated manually on the new site, because there wasn't an easy way to get most of the data out of the old site (we did manage to get news articles out). We consolidated information where possible. For example, there used to be five mission and impact pages, now there is just one, and we streamlined the news and events content together.
- **Content Types:** We implemented Drupal paragraphs to enter content, and whittled the number of content types from 60-80 on the old site to a more manageable 10-15.
- **Improved Search:** We implemented Apache Solr, which allows us to index content in different ways, and to assign higher weight to different fields of data. For example, we can give the TITLE field a higher weight, so if someone searches for "admissions," the Admissions page is likely to be served up higher in search results.
- **Integration Work:** We integrated many external systems into the site. For example, faculty content used to be hosted on the old site, but now there's BEPRESS integration that uses the Drupal Feeds module to bring data on to the site. We also integrated BANNER, the Student Information System (SIS), D2DL (Desire to Learn), and SOPHIA (library software).

Empowering Developers

When St. Kate's was looking for someone to do the redesign, they were really looking for a partner, a vendor who would collaborate with the in-house dev team, and help them become self-sufficient in supporting the site after the project was complete. "We didn't have any dev process. Nobody understood how ModX worked," said St. Kate's Austin Allman, Senior Programmer Analyst. "We didn't have any practices or prejudices. We were very malleable to TEN7's practices." We got them used to the Agile software process, including the use of version control, JIRA issue tracking, and GitFlow to test their feature branches before going into production.

"Any major site like this has a major learning curve, especially if you're dropping a new platform on them," said Les Lim, TEN7 Technical Project Manager. "We tried to be as transparent as possible with what was being built in Drupal 8, so the St. Kate's dev team could see things evolve over time, see the work in progress. That's an instructive thing, more so than just seeing the finished product."

OUTCOME: A FRESH WEBSITE AND POSITIVE INTANGIBLE CHANGES

The new website launched in the summer of 2019, and the feedback has been very positive. People say that the site is so much easier to navigate, all the information is in one place, and they like the visuals. There is now site content for every audience, accessible with their own set of links. The number of help desk tickets looking for information has gone done significantly, meaning people are finding what they need.

Departments can now make content changes to their own site area, freeing the Marketing & Communications Department to focus on their core responsibility, promotion of the University, and raising money through donor programs.

The website redesign process has also changed their dev team. "I've seen this dev team go from group of people who were scared to death to make a decision to seeing leadership come out," said Lisa Gariepy, Information Technology Consultant with St. Kate's. "It's a whole new mindset of being able to see a problem, and know that they should take action, and know they have the power to do that—they don't have to send triplicate emails and wait for a thumbs up. It was helpful for them to keep hearing Les and Jason [Cote, TEN7 Front End Developer] saying 'LET'S JUST DO IT,' and accepting that sometimes they'll make the wrong choice. And if that happens, all we have to do is fix it!"

This has also changed the dynamic between the dev team and the user base. "Before, when users would ask for changes, we would have said 'Nope we can't do it,' because we didn't know how to do it," said Austin. "Now, users are more emboldened to ask for changes, because we know we can we make a change."

Ivan Stegic

CEO

Words that describe Ivan: Relentlessly optimistic. Kind. Equally concerned with client and employee happiness. Physicist. Ethical. Lighthearted and cheerful. Finds joy in the technical stuff. Inspiring. Loyal. Hires smart, curious and kind employees who want to create more good in the world.

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