

DIGITAL MAIN STEET COMMUNITY COLLABORATION PROJECT



Digital Marketplace MyWellSelf.ca Helps Holistic Healthcare Practitioners Connect with Consumers

THE CHALLENGE

Despite the growing interest in complementary and alternative medicine and the expertise of over 17,000 registered holistic healthcare practitioners across Ontario alone, it can be difficult for consumers to know where to get trusted information about their health and wellness options. According to the Fraser Institute, Canadians spent \$6.5 billion on providers of complementary and alternative medicine in 2016. These specialties, each of which has their own regulatory board or professional association, include:

- naturopaths
- chiropractors
- osteopaths
- acupuncturists
- registered massage therapists
- traditional Chinese medicine specialists
- registered holistic nutritionists
- homeopaths

Prior to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, these practitioners marketed their services locally and most of their new clients came from word-of-mouth referrals. Typically, these practitioners operate as independent small business owners or as part of a community healthcare practice. As with many small businesses, they have struggled with digital transformation and the need to expand their online presence during repeated COVID lockdowns.

THE SOLUTION

Recognizing the opportunity to bring consumers together with trusted practitioners, Brenda Ahenkorah founded My Well Self in 2019 - a digital health learning marketplace and networking space that makes it easy for the public to find holistic health providers suited to their health needs. The company is developing a database of local and vetted holistic health providers specific to health, treatment and location needs.



On "mywellself.ca", the public can do general research on a health issue, ask a question about a health issue and receive responses from real, trained and vetted practitioners. By providing a platform for meaningful discussion and exchange of information, users will be more likely to find a holistic healthcare provider suited to their own health needs.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Brenda was getting ready to pilot test the platform in late March 2020 just as the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic shut down Ontario businesses. Most holistic health practitioners were deemed as non-essential services, so they were not able to stay open. Brenda was no longer able to have in-person meetings or do in-person outreach. Her web development stalled and acquisition of practitioners and beta testers slowed to a trickle.

SUPPORT FROM HALTECH AND DIGITAL MAIN STREET

Over the course of the COVID pandemic response there has been tremendous uncertainty in the marketplace about which practitioners are open for in-person appointments, who is able to conduct tele-presence consultations and which businesses are closed.

Brenda participated in Haltech's Beyond Boundaries program for female entrepreneurs in the fall of 2020 and was a finalist in the Hi5 Pitch competition in November. Then, her business was selected as an ideal candidate for a Community Collaboration project leveraging support from Digital Main Street's Future Proof program.

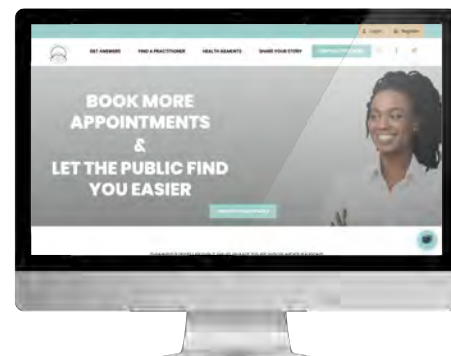
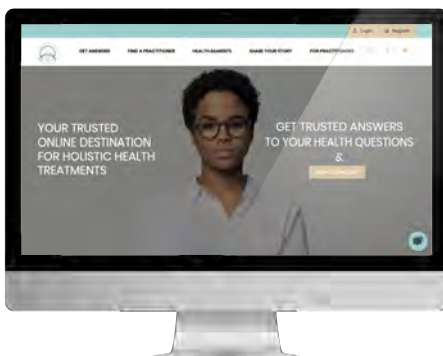


We selected this community collaboration project to support the development of an online community related to holistic health care, to offset some of the stresses related to COVID-19 and to help improve access to holistic health care options. By accelerating adoption of this digital platform, we hope this project will provide learning for practitioners who, in most cases, are running their own small businesses, and for consumers who want to support local providers but haven't had an easy way to find them to date."

Shann McGrail, Executive Director
Haltech Regional Innovation Centre

KEY DELIVERABLES

- Developer made final website enhancements to streamline practitioner signups
- Implemented Hubspot CRM for managing practitioner vetting and tagging and keeping track of consumer engagement
- Conducted email campaigns and numerous digital and print advertising campaigns; providing weekly summary of results to Haltech
- Tested local influencers for social media engagement



THE IMPACT

Brenda leveraged the support from DMS to provide part-time employment to a digital marketing specialist and an inside sales person. By the end of the 14-week project, the team had generated new sign-ups of practitioners and consumers with over 120 questions asked, 300 trusted answers from practitioners and 650 comments or responses from the community.

At the time of publication (April 30, 2021), the company had over 670 followers on their Facebook page, over 1,350 followers on Twitter and almost 3,600 followers on Instagram.

NEXT STEPS

MyWellSelf.ca is positioned for growth and geographic expansion. As the third wave of COVID-19 continues to keep many practitioners' offices closed to in-person visits, Brenda is leveraging the learning from the DMS Community Collaboration project to enable her to support even more practitioners to build relationships with potential customers and help the community thrive in the months ahead.

SUPPORTERS

This Digital Main Street project was made possible through financial support from the Government of Canada through FedDev Ontario's Regional Relief and Recovery Fund.

For more than 10 years, FedDev Ontario has worked to advance and diversify the southern Ontario economy through funding opportunities and business services that support innovation and growth in Canada's most populous region. The Agency has delivered impressive results,

which can be seen in southern Ontario businesses that are creating innovative technologies, improving their productivity, growing their revenues, and in the economic advancement of communities across the region.

Digital Main Street was created by the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) with direct support from the City of Toronto. DMS is also supported by a group of strategic business partners, including Google, Mastercard, Shopify, Microsoft, Facebook, Intuit QuickBooks, Square, Yellow Pages and Lightspeed. A \$42.5-million investment from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and a \$7.45-million investment from the Government of Ontario brought together the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, Communtech and Invest Ottawa to expand the Digital Main Street Platform in order to support more businesses going digital in response to the impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario.

Haltech is a not-for-profit Regional Innovation Centre funded by the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Haltech provides entrepreneurial education, advisory services and strategic connections to technology start up and scale up companies in Halton Region to help them accelerate growth and bring innovations to market. Haltech was selected by Communtech as their delivery partner for the Digital Main Street Future Proof Program in Halton Region.

With the support of the Government of Canada
through the Federal Economic Development
Agency for Southern Ontario.

Canada

COMMUNITECH