

Case Study: DNA Software

DNA Software is an Ann Arbor-based software firm that helps university, biotech and pharmaceutical researchers build diagnostic tests for life-sciences projects. Launched in 2001, the company has been restructuring its business model and expanding its product line to increase revenue. Helping advance those strategic objectives has been participation in Michigan's Pure Michigan Business Connect Economic Gardening Network, says Joe Johnson, DNA Software's vice president of business development.

One of the Economic Gardening® specialists' first assignments was to analyze DNA Software's website. "It was a train wreck," admits Johnson. "The content was technically overwhelming and made people feel unintelligent — even for our audience, who are scientists. We needed to communicate a clear value proposition for our software, which we weren't doing." Navigation was also difficult, he adds. For example, it took five clicks to download software for a free trial.

The Economic Gardening research team suggested changes to make the DNA Software website more user-friendly — some of which the company was able to implement immediately. The team also showed DNA Software how to get involved in social media and industry-specific "watering holes" to increase awareness and drive more traffic to its website.

"Our website was always an important tool, but it's becoming even more critical as we move from a desktop model to an SaaS model where clients can submit a design and send it over the cloud," explains Johnson. "I had been championing a website redesign before we entered the program, but having outsiders point out its flaws really got everyone's attention."

Market research was another area of assistance, and the Economic Gardening team generated a list of 600 industry-specific leads to pursue in addition to identifying new opportunities in agriculture and food safety. "Our company is R&D heavy, so working with the Economic Gardening team essentially gave me an instant marketing staff for several weeks," says Johnson.

Although DNA Software had already begun to revise its business model before entering the Economic Gardening program, the engagement "helped us steer better," Johnson adds. "The research team reinforced areas where we were on the right track, helped identify our weaknesses and gave us new things to think about. It was a real shot in the arm."



The Edward Lowe Foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports entrepreneurship through research, recognition and educational programs, which are delivered through entrepreneur support organizations (ESOs).



The National Center for Economic Gardening is a partnership between the foundation and Chris Gibbons. NCEG delivers Economic Gardening services and maintains national standards in training and certification for both regional and state networks. For more info, visit www.edwardlowe.org.