Specialization

My Communications specialization is Advertising.

Environmental Context

The Rescue Mission Alliance (rescuemissionalliance.org) has been serving Central New York for over 100 years. They have locations in Syracuse, Binghamton, Auburn, and Ithaca that serve those cities and their surrounding areas by providing emergency and long-term housing, meals, child care, employment and job training, transportation, food pantries, health services, and more. They also operate 15 Thrifty Shopper (ishopthrifty.org) stores that collect donated clothes and home goods, and sell them to help fund their programs.

However, the message of the Rescue Mission often gets muddled; they provide so many different services which vary between locations; the branding of their programs can be inconsistent or non-existent; and their donation and thrift store model means they are sometimes confused with the Salvation Army.

An organization's website is their most important marketing and communications tool, and their public face for the majority of their potential customers—in the case of the Rescue Mission their volunteers, donors, and clients (Colwyn, 2015). It's vital for the Rescue Mission to make a strong first impression and provide clear, impactful information.

Feeling that their current online presence could use some help, the Rescue Mission requested informal proposals from several local creative agencies, on how they would go about refreshing their website and other aspects of their brand. The Director of Marketing and their staff chose agencies to contact based on how their own websites and bodies of work demonstrate their philosophies on content, design, and research. ASD Web & Creative Agency was chosen as one of those proposing agencies, and submitted our thoughts for the Rescue Mission in the document included later.

Communication Plan

ASD Creative Website: allisondevoe.com/capstone

Note: For the purposes of this project, the agency does not have existing client work or contact information. Links to those pages are there to help the appearance of an agency website, but are purposefully non-functional.

Proposal

The plan for communicating to the Rescue Mission consists of the email response to their initial inquiry, with the attached proposal document.

To: marketing@rescuemissionalliance.org
From: allison@asdcreative.com
Subject: Re: Web Redesign Proposal

[Director of Marketing],

Thank you for this opportunity to work with the Rescue Mission Alliance. As a lifelong Central New Yorker, I've seen the incredible impact you have on the communities you serve, and the dedication everything at the Rescue Mission has to their work. Our team at the ASD Web & Creative Agency want to help.

We believe that developing a online presence at this scale, for your large service area and so many stakeholders, takes a true partnership we're ready to form with you. Attached is a proposal of how we would address the current strengths and weaknesses of the current website and digital strategy to provide a foundation that the Rescue Mission can grow their organization on for years to come.

Don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or clarifications, and I look forward to working with you.

Allison DeVoe
President and Creative Director
ASD Web & Creative Agency

ASD WEB & CREATIVE AGENCY

proposal for digital strategy, content, design, and development services for

Contact: Allison DeVoe
President & Creative Director
allison@asdcreative.com
315–396–8350

If we ask the Rescue Mission who they are, this is what you have to say:

> *"The Rescue Mission Alliance **strives to share hope, end hunger and homelessness, change lives and strengthen communities** one person at a time... In all of our locations, case managers help guests develop individual plans and connect with the support they need to leave homelessness and hunger behind."*

But if we ask people in the communities you serve...

> *"**Animals?** Animals. It involves animals. I'm like 60% sure."* – M., Jamesville

> *"I never realized until today that the Rescue Mission wasn't a **national organization**."* – Erin, grew up in Cicero

> *"I'm **impressed by the range of services** they offer, to include job placement, transportation, and others to help people get on their feet."* – Sara, previous Syracuse resident

> *"I **had no idea** that Thrifty Shopper (my son's favorite store) was a part of the Rescue Mission."* – Kathy, Watertown

> *"It's fantastic and admirable that the goal is placement in **permanent housing** and not just temporary shelter."* – Helen, grew up in DeWitt

> *"I totally **confused** them with the Salvation Army."* – John, Cortland

The breadth and depth of the services provided, and the wide range of audiences that need to know about them, makes communicating about the Rescue Mission a complex task. But our commitment to involving your clients, volunteers, and entire team from Day 1, and our combination of participation, collaboration, research, and user–first design and technologies will make it easier for people to find the Rescue Mission and ultimately support it or get the support they need.

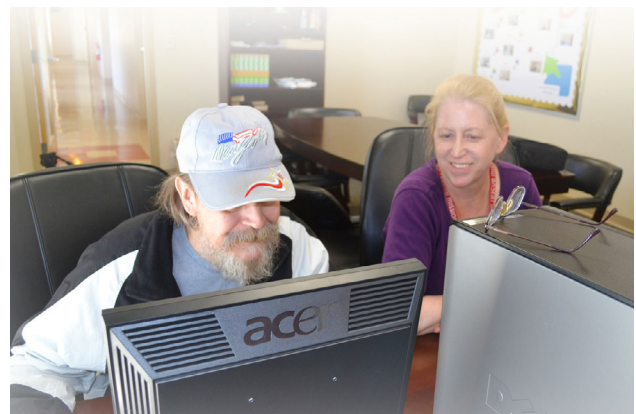**Overall – current issues we'd like to work on:**

- Like many websites, the Rescue Mission's presence is structured much like their organization: content is separated by location even when it addresses organization–wide information.

- The giving experience leaves donors wanting more (or really, less). There are so many options and detours that donors are forced to choose quickly, or leave.

- At the same time, the site is almost too donor and visitor focused; there is little online about how Rescue Mission services can be accessed, as the basics like a phone number or address can take several layers of digging to find.

- A separate presence for Thrifty Shopper leads some customers and donors alike confused about who they're really helping.

The importance of a strong digital presence for the Rescue Mission

The effectiveness of a usable, compelling website is universal. Consumer websites can double their online sales by focusing on the user experience, and over 90% of customers will use a website for research before making an online purchase (Nielsen, 2007; McPartlin, 2012). Nielsen studies have shown that many user behaviors and metrics, including these, are relatively accurate regardless of industry and can be transferred to the non-profit and human services fields.

While the digital divide still affects technology access for lower-income individuals, 91% of families below the poverty line have some access to the internet, and mobile phone usage for the homeless is as high as 84% in some areas (Rideout, 2016; McInnes, 2013). People worried about their living or hunger situations are likely to use the internet to look for support and resources when they don't know where else to turn.

On the donor side, the Rescue Mission is competing with other community and national organizations for time and money from supports. A study by the Nielsen Norman Group (2014) found that the most important information to a donor is the "type of work that the organization does and how that work is being done"—and if they don't find clear and transparent information fast, they're going to go elsewhere. In addition, those interested in supporting their community with their time or money will often look online for organizations that provide specific services, looking to organization websites more than any other source (Nielsen, 2011).. We want them to find what the Rescue Mission has to offer quickly and easily.

Working with you, not just for you

The team at ASD Creative believes in working with everyone with a stake in the result: leadership, board members, employees, volunteers, donors, current and past clients, Thrifty Shopper customers, and community members that have yet to engage with the Rescue Mission. With so many perspectives on the services you provide, it's important to find out what knowledge is already out there, what needs to be emphasized more, and what needs to be corrected. In addition, the people on the ground every day— whether serving meals, providing training, running family programming, or living in your emergency shelter—can speak to the impact of the Rescue Mission on each individual community in an authentic way.

This can't always be captured in an interview or focus group; that's why observation and participation are at the core of our process. Many creative services agencies will talk about "research" as Step One of their process, but we do it differently. We don't think getting your creative team in a room to talk about what you already talk about every day is going to produce the best results. While the creative and leadership vision for the Rescue Mission is vital, we're coming in as a blank slate, to learn about you from scratch. And this research isn't a step for us, it's ongoing. Members of our team will continue to talk, observe, discuss, and ask for feedback while they are also working on the content, design, development, and overall strategy.

All parts of our team will take part in the search and observation, including Content, Design, Development, and Digital Strategists. Activities from the start could include:

- Spending a day—and a night—riding along with the Rescue Mission's mobile response vehicle, watching them work with and provide items to homeless individuals, and talk to them about how they got in contact with the Rescue Mission and what the services mean to them.

- Asking shelter residents and others that visit any of the Rescue Mission's locations to participate in card sort exercises. They would be given a variety of things they make look for (or have looked for) on the Rescue Mission website, and asked to choose the labels for them.

Some of our clients and staff working on card sort exercises.
Card sorting helps determine the language used on the web, by
exploring what users expect something to be called or found under.
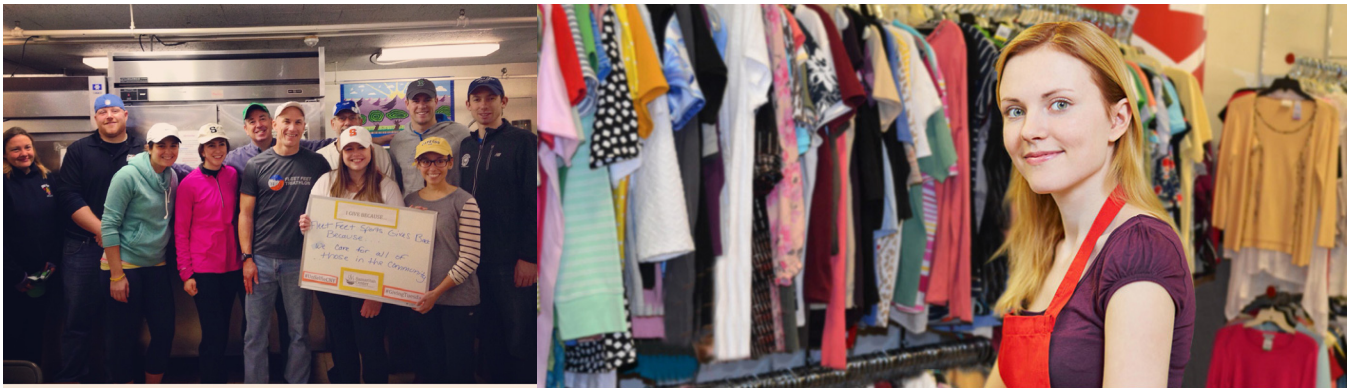
- Talking to customers at Thrifty Shopper stores, to see how much they know about the Rescue Mission, if they shop there specifically to support it, and if so what motivates them to support it.

- Engaging with current and potential donors, individually and in groups, to learn not only what makes them want to support the Rescue Mission, but also brainstorming what would make that experience easier for them.

- Testing the current website with members of the community, with varying levels of familiarity with the Rescue Mission. This could include concrete tasks like finding the hours of a shelter, more general information gathering to watch the paths they take, or even having them use search engines to learn about the Rescue Mission and seeing what search terms they use.

- Developers and Designers talking with IT, marketing, and administrative staff who will be maintaining and updating the website on a daily basis. They'll work to understand internal workflows, approval structures, work styles, and capabilities, to ensure the site is built on a content management system that they can use.

- Asking development staff that work on corporate gifting and grant applications what they hear most often from outside organizations they contact—what they look for in an organization, what makes an organization they choose stand out, and where they may see the Rescue Mission lacking.

The benefit of doing these kinds of in-person research early and often through the process is flexibility. Our team goes into each with a specific goal to leave with, but as conversations and observations continue, they may branch out to other questions or activities that provide even more insight that can only be gleaned on-site. The "participation" aspect of our research means that those we work with don't just answer a list of questions we give them; they help shape the situations we observe and the questions we ask to others.

This work relies on complete and authentic buy-in from all involved. We need to get at real thoughts and feelings, not what people think we want to hear from them. In many cases, the people we will work are already dedicated to the Rescue Mission. They have already given their time or money, and are willing to give more. Or they've benefited from the Rescue Mission services, and want others to as well. It's important for everyone, regardless of previous involvement, to know that their contribution is important. That messaging needs to come from the leadership of the organization as well as the marketing department, and encourage these candid conversations and even unprompted contributions. There may be some cases identified through the process, like community members unfamiliar with the Rescue Mission, or some staff, volunteers, or clients, where a small token such as a Thrifty Shopper gift card may be appropriate as a thank you.

This openness may sometimes lead to some hard truths and discoveries. Internal disagreements of both vision and practicality are also bound to happen as people from disparate roles and offices interact for the first time. Our goal is to tell the difference between times when two different points of view need to be included in the web project, and opinions of a vocal minority that appear to be commonplace. We will not make any decisions lightly, and our mission is to back everything up with more that anecdotes, but substantive research. We understand that sometimes, the overwhelming opinion or idea of a stakeholder group may be in direct conflict with the Rescue Mission's operational goals, or not feasible under the current structure. But we are asking you to be open to all considerations, no matter how drastic, when working with us.
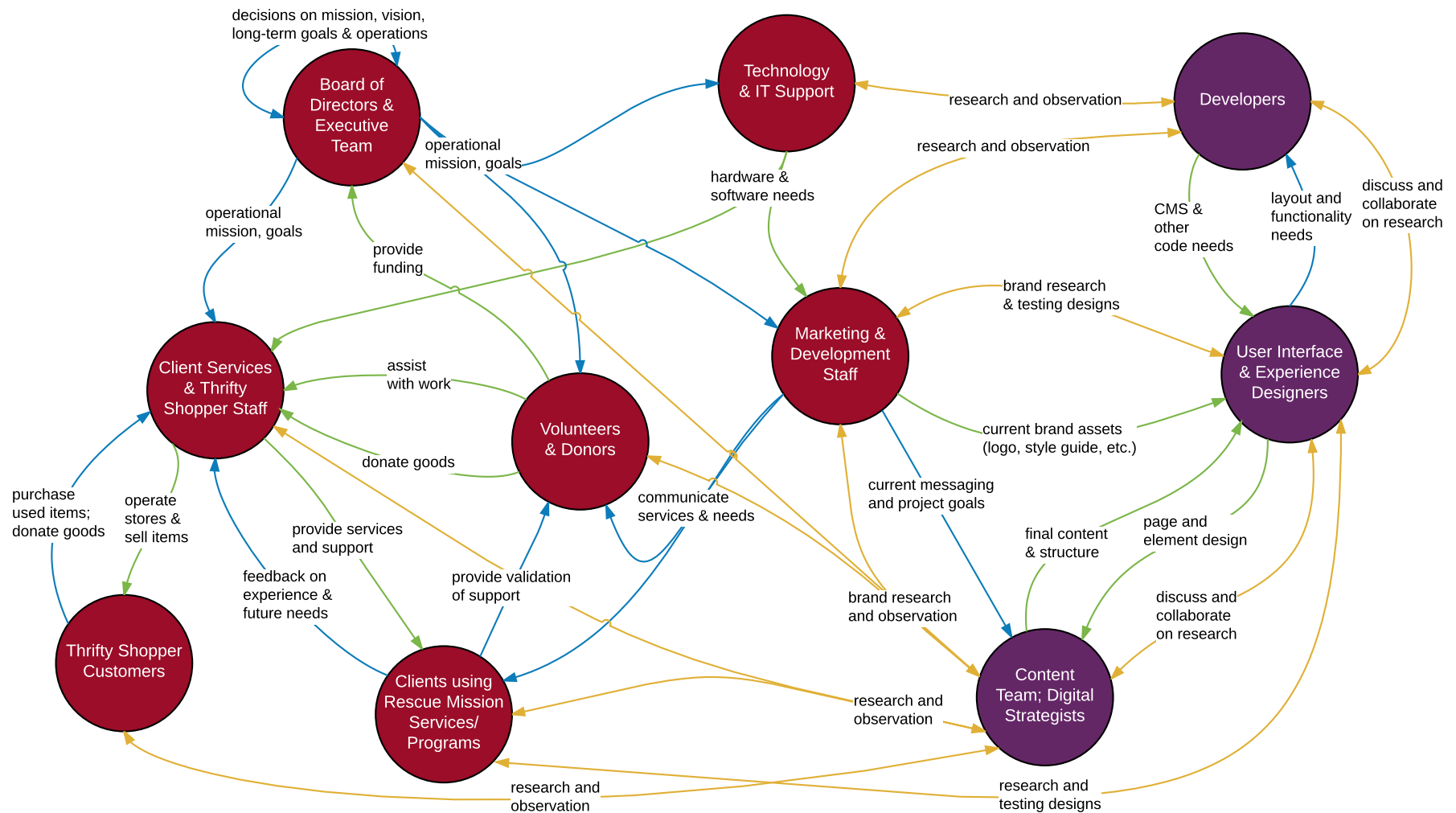
Your Perfect Partner

ASD Creative wants to partner and collaborate fully with the Rescue Mission to observe, explore, innovate, review, discuss, and ultimately uplift the web presence of the Rescue Mission to be the most effective and impactful it can be.

Impact would mean a lot of different things to the Rescue Mission. It would mean a wider and more positive public profile, both locally and regionally. It would mean more knowledge of and access to resources for those at risk of homelessness or hunger, increasing the number of people you're helping by hundreds or thousands per year. It would mean more donors find, understand, and contribute their time and money to the Rescue Mission. And it would mean an impressive and well-supported organization that attracts even more foundation and corporate giving.

These results feed off of each other to create a cycle of giving and getting support, to grow and expand the Rescue Mission for years to come—and we believe that the ASD Creative philosophy and team is the perfect partner for this advancement.

Value Web Diagram

Board of Directors & Executive Team
- decisions on mission, vision, long-term goals & operations
- operational mission, goals
- provide funding

Technology & IT Support
- hardware & software needs
- research and observation

Developers
- research and observation
- CMS & other code needs
- layout and functionality needs
- discuss and collaborate on research

Client Services & Thrifty Shopper Staff
- operational mission, goals
- assist with work
- purchase used items; donate goods
- operate stores & sell items
- provide services and support
- feedback on experience & future needs

Volunteers & Donors
- donate goods
- provide validation of support
- communicate services & needs

Marketing & Development Staff
- brand research & testing designs
- current brand assets (logo, style guide, etc.)
- current messaging and project goals

User Interface & Experience Designers
- brand research and observation
- final content & structure
- page and element design
- discuss and collaborate on research

Thrifty Shopper Customers

Clients using Rescue Mission Services/Programs
- research and observation

Content Team; Digital Strategists
- research and observation
- research and testing designs

Legend

Knowledge & Expertise	Goods, Services, & Tangible Deliverables	Iteration of Observation Collaboration, & Creation

Rescue Mission Stakeholders (Client)   Creative Agency Stakeholders

Stakeholder Matrix

Rescue Mission	
Who are they?	**What is valuable to them?**
Executive Team (including CEO) and Board of Directors	• Awareness and positive sentiment for the Rescue Mission • Efficient organizational spending, high return on investments; increased donations and grants
Marketing and Development Staff	• Authentic and consistent messaging in all communications and media • Increase in donations, grants, and volunteer support; high (measurable) return on investment
Client Services and Thrifty Shopper Staff	• The resources to help as many people as possible in their community • Volunteer assistance that is dedicated and skilled
Volunteers and Donors	• Sense of accomplishment and impact; recognition and/or thanks • Knowing they are supporting a quality organization and their money will be used well • Ease in the process of giving their time and money
Clients using Rescue Mission services	• Getting direct help through goods, services, locations quickly and easily, especially in emergencies • Being treated with compassion and humanity
Thrifty Shopper Customers	• Quality items at a low price, and knowing they are supporting their community by shopping
ASD Agency	
Who are they?	**What is valuable to them?**
Overall Creative Team	• Clear understanding of technical, practical, and aesthetic needs so they can execute • Avoiding last minute changes or complaints from the client or users
Content Strategists and Creators	• Uncovered and developing true insights about the organization, their employees, volunteers, donors, and clients • Creating a compelling and engaging face for the Rescue Mission
Interface and Experience Designers	• Stretching their creativity to create unique designs and site for the Rescue Mission, while following understood navigation and layout patterns • Ensured usability and efficiency of the site by working with clients and others
Developers	• Creating a content management system or platform that can be expanded upon in the future • Ensuring Rescue Mission staff understand how to make changes as needed, and how to do so using best practices
Digital Strategists	• Streamlining how different elements of the Rescue Mission's digital presence can work together, helping them achieve that

Decision Makers

The Rescue Mission is a non-profit organization with a Board of Directors as well as a leadership team of Executive, Operations, Development, Financial, Programs, and Information Officers. This does not change the decision making drastically, but may add more complexity to the process.

The email and proposal included are aimed at the Director of Marketing at the Rescue Mission (LinkedIn, 2016). As the most senior communications professional, they will be the primary decision maker along this process, either providing the most influential input or giving the final word. ASD Creative was initially contacted by the Director and they will evaluate all proposals they receive, with their staff that will most involved in the process and knowledgeable about each aspect of the project (technology, design, writing, etc.). However, contract approval will fall on the Chief Executive; while the process itself is not routine, a web project of this scale would be considered a "routine" contract that would not require the Board's approval or execution (Masters, n.d.). The CEO would not make the decision alone of course, most likely relying on the recommendation of the Director of Marketing as well as the CFO and financial office regarding the budget and cost. The CEO or Director may choose to consult the Board and solicit feedback on the proposals received, but it is not required. This will depend on the internal politics of the organization, and if any Board members have professional experience with any of the proposing organizations and may provide valuable insight about working with them.

Once a proposal is chosen and work is underway, the project will be managed in the Marketing department under the Director. The Director would be the final sign-off on work, be the tie-breaker for split decisions, and in—hopefully rare—cases have veto power over decisions they see as not in the best interest of the Rescue Mission. Most likely, this project will overhaul the language and methods the Rescue Mission uses to communicate its message, but will not make any major changes to the message itself. If however ASD Creative and/or the Director of Marketing were proposing drastic changes, the Board of Directors would have to be consulted and provide input or possibly vote on those actions and how they would impact the Rescue Mission's vision, purpose, public standing, or integrity (BoardSource, 2010). They may advise for or against choices, but the final decision will still fall on the Director of Marketing.

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