

College of Business and Economics' technology center helps first client redevelop business Web site

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Spinning wheels, fibers, books and more are available for purchase at Babe's Fiber Garden's Web site thanks to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's Wisconsin Center for Information Technology Services (Wi-CITS) and UW-Whitewater students.

Wi-CITS provides students real-life experience working with information and technology services for the College of Business and Economics and local clients.

Whitewater entrepreneur Nels Wiberg of Babe's Fiber Garden, Wi-CITS's first client, specializes in spinning equipment and innovative spinning wheel designs. Babe's Fiber Garden manufactures and sells these wheels all over the world to consumers including hobbyists and small spinning businesses.

"I was having a hard time keeping up my Web site," Wiberg said. "Making price changes on the site was difficult, and I was seeking an easier way."

Wiberg became aware of Wi-CITS and its services through a news release. UW-Whitewater students Aaron Patrick and Jessica Menke and Information Technology and Business Education Professors John Chenoweth and Paul Ambrose helped organize and redevelop Wiberg's Web site.

"Wiberg came to Wi-CITS wanting a new Web site that was easier to use and had a new look," Patrick said. "We gave him a site with a 'fresh coat of paint' that was easier to maintain and update."

A brand new Web site was developed using Web 2.0 design principles that include easy navigation and a placement and payment system. The new system has a data bank that allows Wiberg to make easy product price adjustments and add or remove items.

The new Babe's Fiber Garden Web site was also created with search engine optimization (SEO) or high ranking of content, to ensure it would appear on the first pages of search engines like Google and Yahoo.

"Within a month of launching the new site with SEO in mind, it had visits from all 50 states in the U.S. and 64 countries worldwide," Ambrose said. "Those numbers are phenomenal and have helped increase Wiberg's business outreach."

"The design and development of the new Babe's Fiber Garden Web site was a collaborative effort between owner, Nels Wiberg, and our Wi-CITS," Chenoweth said. "The new Web site allows individuals to learn about its products and how to purchase them online."

"This is a great opportunity for our students as they gain real-world experience working on real-world projects while still under UW-Whitewater faculty guidance," Ambrose said. "Skills such as client interviewing and client-relationship management cannot fully develop in the classroom. Through this valuable opportunity, students can acquire these skills."

"From working at the center I have gained programming, teamwork and time management skills," Wi-CITS student Amy Caywood said. "Each Web site we create is unique to what the client wants, which has influenced me to become more creative and think outside the box."

For more information on Babe's Fiber Garden visit www.babesfibergarden.com or contact Wiberg at nelswiberg2@gmail.com or (262) 473-2009.

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