

Case Study: Cheapskate Monthly



Cheapskate Monthly Home Page

Published monthly and read by close to 100,000 subscribers, *Cheapskate Monthly* is a consumer newsletter dedicated to helping individuals who are struggling to live within their means find practical and realistic solutions for their financial problems. Now in its 10th year of business, *Cheapskate Monthly* continues to expand its consumer influence and subscriber base, most notably through its electronic family of subscribers via the online edition of the monthly newsletter at www.cheapskatemonthly.com.

Requirements Summary

The high-profile, subscription-based website provides an unparalleled, ever-growing archive of information and tools for debt elimination, including an extensive library of articles, rich tool chest, bookstore, specialty calculators, tips galore and much more for use by subscribers. Multiple levels of subscribers and the vast and ever growing amount of content available on the website had led to increasingly complex site navigation. Improved site functionality was needed, as the existing website infrastructure could not support development of new user and administration features. Enhanced content presentation was needed to improve communication with existing subscribers and attract new subscribers.

The new application had to be manageable by a very small internal staff. The company has limited IT resources, so the new system had to be able to function with minimal staff maintaining and managing it and employ dynamic content wherever possible. Expert programming and a reliable, scalable solution for web hosting was needed to handle traffic spikes occurring monthly (as each new issue was released) and following national radio and television appearances made by Mary Hunt. After an evaluation of vendors, Cheapskate Monthly selected Imagine IT's LiveWeb™ application suite to form the core of its new website and provide related graphic design and production services, web authoring, database design and development, custom programming, quality control and testing services.

Solution Summary

The design approach was to streamline content management, fully automate product purchases and related setup procedures, and provide a flexible application for long-term scalability with which Cheapskate Monthly could expand its online vision. The core of the new website was created using the following components from Imagine IT's LiveWeb™ application suite: **eBusiness** (User Manager, Feedback Manager/Workflow Management Tools, Authentication and User Validation), **eBusiness Plus** (Article Manager to publish, update and manage articles, news and press releases, Calendar of Events and Event Manager for publishing upcoming seminars and appearances, etc. and Active Content

The Opportunity

Mary Hunt, founder of Cheapskate Monthly, can be seen on such national television shows as *Good Morning America* and *Oprah*; and is a regular contributor to KNBC-TV Los Angeles; and *Woman's Day*, *Sam's Source*, *Family Circle* and *HomeLife* magazines. Debuting in 1998, the Cheapskate Monthly Website has attracted more than 2.5 million visitors. The original website had served the company well in the beginning, but as the business grew, managing subscribers, content and site maintenance became complex and labor-intensive. By 2000/01, the company recognized it was saddled with an inflexible website infrastructure and faced the challenge of completely rebuilding the website.

Manager for changing information in marquee messages, special alerts, breaking news, customer-specific messages, etc., **eCommerce** (product browser, product profiler, product management tools, Shopping Cart, Order Wizard, Order Management System, Shipping & Tax components, **Accounting** (order entry, receive payments, accounting synchronization tools) and **AutoMessage System** (email merge, autoresponders, internet email marketing engine).

An extensive amount of time was spent upfront scoping the project to simplify content presentation, condense content and devise an expert user interface and navigation system that would facilitate efficient, logical site navigation. The website was completely reorganized with the same content, but with a new, highly refined navigational system that supports multiple user levels and multiple levels of site navigation to give users a consistent experience whether they are devouring the latest monthly newsletter, browsing the bookstore, participating in a discussion group, trying out calculators, looking for event information or head elsewhere on the site. Main and sub-navigation components for each area of the website were developed and programmed to support multiple subscriber levels. Graphical on/off versions for all main menu and sub-navigation buttons were created to give users a visual status of where they are on the website at any given time.

The Home Page was completely redesigned with a new graphical look and feel and a highly organized layout, serving as a portal to the rest of the site with special navigation and teasers to all other content. Designed to accentuate Mary's magnetic, highly personal communication that drives audiences back to the site again and again, the Home Page displays unique content daily at the top of the page/first content that comes into view (i.e., the system automatically pulling the latest "Daily Thought" item and teasers to the Home Page) and provides one-click access to all other areas of the website.

A dedicated, dynamic page was designed for the company's flagship product: the online monthly newsletter. The attractive newsletter format has multiple columns and a highly organized format wherein articles and summaries (click on the article summary "snippets" to go to full article) are automatically displayed from the article database. The article manager is a stellar component, handling over 10,000 articles and 30 different article types, simplifying content presentation and streamlining maintenance.

A database structure was developed to employ dynamic content throughout this extensive website, enabling Cheapskate Monthly staff to modify and update pages directly as necessary. Though simple in appearance, the database design strategy streamlines content management using advanced web technology and scripting. Backoffice reports and forms were created for updating various types of content and made readily accessible through the online administration menu in the Website Control Center. The databases structure included User/Customer, Products, Feedback/Workflow, Articles, Events/Calendar, Orders, Subscription, Subscription Periods, Issues, Delivery Methods, Payments, Shipping, Taxes and Activity Tracking data. Content was imported into web databases and template/re-usable page layouts were created with custom scripting to attractively and dynamically display a wealth of content to multiple levels of subscribers. Content editors can see special edit links (if they are authorized/have the correct access level) placed next to each dynamic item throughout the website which allows them to quickly make edits from the same interface that visitors use.

Content access was clearly marked for areas of the website requiring a basic, premium or other subscription, such as the latest issue or back issues of the monthly online newsletter, Mary's article archives, or the tool chest containing over 40 calculators to help people figure out everything from appliance operating cost to a rapid debt repayment plan (i.e., cookie recognition automatically gives users access to their special areas, based on membership type) vs. areas of the website offering a limited amount of content such as a free preview issue.

Enhancements and full site automation was achieved in key areas of the website, most notably through deployment of feedback/workflow management tools which handles over 30 different types of feedback coming from all areas of the website. Incoming feedback items are automatically grouped by category into a single report and automatically assigned and routed to designated staff for handling via email notification which includes subscriber status information. The feedback/workflow management system improved communication with existing subscribers and visitors by streamlining receipt and processing times for all types of requests received via the website. Feedback can be easily configured by designated administrators using the Feedback Category maintenance form.

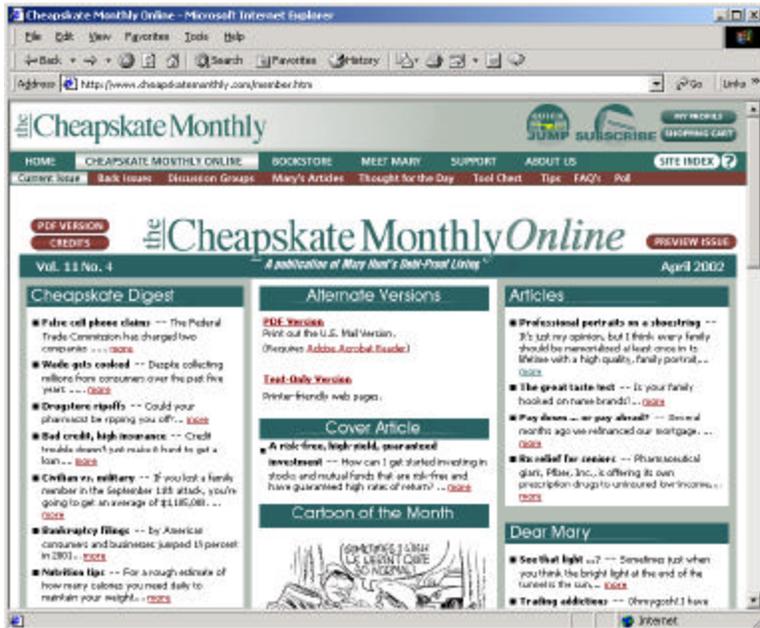
The Subscribe Now feature which handles new and renewal subscription purchases (for both the online version and the U.S. Mail version of the monthly newsletter) via a secure Order Wizard and Shopping Cart, automatically sets up the subscription in the backoffice—eliminating the need for human intervention. The bookstore was completely redesigned with a new product catalog, shopping cart and order wizard and a comprehensive order management system was implemented which also included an automated email notification messaging system for order status updates (automatic email updates are triggered by events such as “credit card declined,” “order shipped,” etc.).

Complete upgrades were made to the Discussion groups, Monthly Poll, Money Quiz, Tips area (including Browse Tips, Tip Contest, Enter a Tip, Tip Winners, Tip-a-friend Contest and Tip Voting Ballot) and FAQs to improve functionality and maintenance of these components.

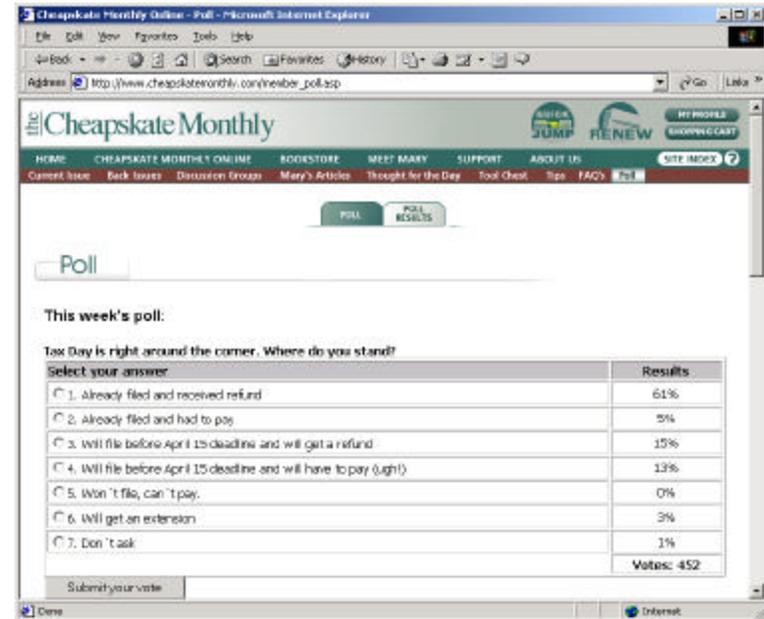
Backoffice enhancements made user and member authentication easier to manage and easier for the user. Activity tracking reports the most popular database items (e.g., forums, chat rooms, products, articles, faq's, events, users, etc.) with ongoing addition of tracking points to better define measurables for improved reporting. Marketing services allow the company to develop an improved profile of the site's visitors and target them for future email campaigns, including customer promotions and event email alerts.

Cheapskate Monthly - developed frontend website and related backoffice application for this high profile company supporting heavy content dissemination to a large consumer subscriber base. Site is a full-featured, dynamic application involving multiple user levels, sophisticated/highly refined navigation, vast content libraries and facilitates easy, efficient site maintenance. Please visit www.cheapskatemonthly.com for more information.

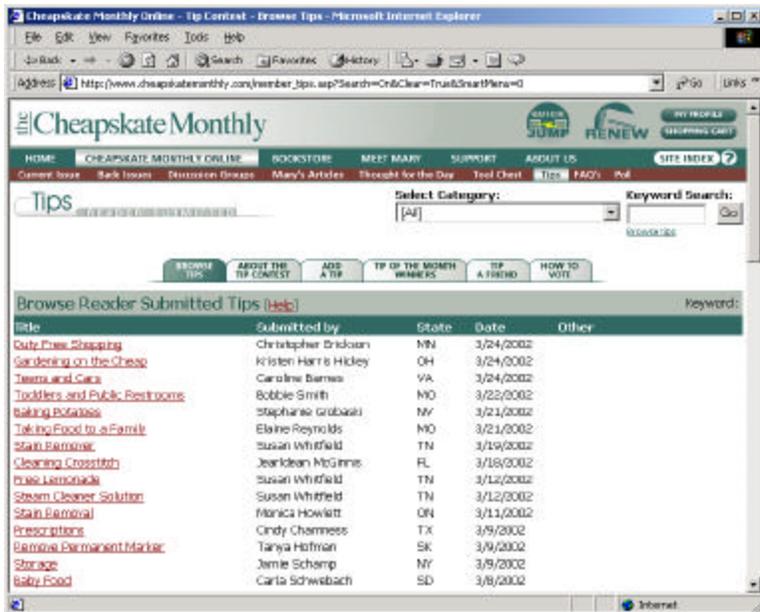
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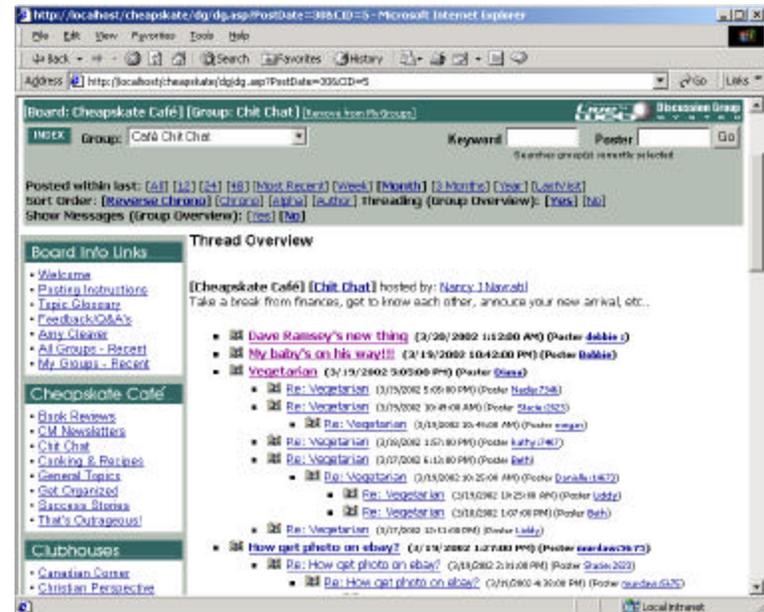
Application: Cheapskate Monthly Website
Section: Cheapskate Monthly Newsletter (Dynamic Display)



Application: Cheapskate Monthly Website
Section: Member Poll Ballot (Dynamic Report)



Application: Cheapskate Monthly Website
Section: Browse Tips Page (Dynamic Report)



Application: Cheapskate Monthly Website
Section: LiveWeb Discussion Groups