

**TEAM REPORT**

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# Introduction

The Loving Paw is a small business dedicated to designing and selling products that will raise awareness about animal adoption. Run by Alexis Enright out of Scottsdale, Arizona, the business sells t-shirts, custom dog tags and other animal adoption related products and donates 10% of the proceeds to the 501(3) non-profit organization Athletes for Animals. The business is run on a user built site hosted on GoDaddy and Alexis designs and creates her products out of her house. In addition to her online orders, Alexis travels the country and attends various pet related events in order to help spread the positive message about animal adoption (as well as sell a few more products). Due to her efforts, The Loving Paw has been steadily growing over the past few years and Alexis is ready to start expanding the business into more professional territory.

# v0.1

We made contact with Alexis immediately after the group decided on The Loving Paw as our project. We were able to set up a meeting with her the weekend after the project selection. Unfortunately, due to other commitments by both the client and team members, the meeting was only able to last 90 minutes to do preliminary requirements gathering. We sat down with Alexis to discuss what her business does, is it a profit or non-profit organization, walk through her current site, find out what technology she is currently using to register and host her site and discuss further what she was looking for from us.

Alexis’ message to us was that she was looking to start expanding her business from a home garage operation to a legitimate small (primarily) business but that she didn’t like her current site hosted by GoDaddy and designed by her with GoDaddy site making tools. She also made very clear to us that she is technologically illiterate when it comes to designing things online, even with site building tools. On top of this, her site had designed piecemeal using GoDaddy for hosting, WordPress for her blog, and Etsy for her shop. The Etsy shop in particular was frustrating for her because it redirected from The Loving Paw site to Etsy itself which has some stifling policies for growing businesses. From our discussion with her, we determined that what she wanted was a brand new site with professional looking design that has centralized features (i.e. shopping cart featured on the site instead of a redirect), and the same features as her previous site. In addition to this, the site had to be easy to manage and edit for someone who has no knowledge of computer code. Most importantly however, due the small size of the company, the web site needed to be completely functional and ready to use by the end of the semester as there was no IT department that would be able to take what we had completed and improve upon it.

With these requirements in mind, the team sat down to discuss our options. After a robust two hour discussion in which every team member contributed quite a few ideas, the following options were decided on as potential choices for our client.

1. Remain with GoDaddy/Etsy/Wordpress. Though this was almost explicitly what the client said she DIDN’T what, a financial analysis revealed that at the level she was at, it would be the most cost effective decision to stay with the format she had.
2. Sign up for Shopify and let us design the site and site functions for her. This option was more in line with what the client wanted and provides easy to use, “out of the box” tools that would make it easy for the client to maintain and manage once our part of the project is completed. Additionally, the site functions are centralized with many available apps to add additional functionality to the site if she decides upon it later. Though this was the least cost effective option for her at this time, her goal of growing of her business means a site on Shopify will eventually come more in line with her goals if she is able to increase her sales.
3. The third option for the client was to allow us to design her site from scratch. This idea was easily the most cost effective as it would cost very little aside from site hosting and domain name registration and provided the most potential creativity as we wouldn’t be restricted by the paid service site building tools. The risk of this option is that there was no guarantee that we would be able to complete the site with the necessary functionality by the end of the semester.

We presented the clients with this option and after some discussion, she elected to use Shopify for her site hosting and designing needs. This was primarily due to the fact that a centralized site that would be easy to maintain and would be completed for her was the primary goal over cost and potential creativity. Understanding that the project that she needed would be completed relatively quickly, we also decided to start brainstorming ideas for analytics campaigns for her new site to try and provide some extra value to the client for her future endeavors.

# v0.2

Release v0.2 started with us reconnecting with Alexis to get a better feel for what kind of site design she was looking for using the Shopify tools. We presented her with numerous sample sites using Shopify for her to get some ideas for what she wanted to do. She came back to us saying that she wanted a “rustic modern” feel for The Loving Paw that was gender neutral and gave the site a down to earth, natural feel that she felt would appeal to her customers.

We began by going through the ready-made Shopify themes to decide what templates would allow us to meet the goals of The Loving Paw the best. We eventually settled on the “Minimal” theme which initially looked very much like it sounded. We selected this theme as we thought it would give us the most flexibility in deciding how we wanted to style the site. We quickly found out though that though the theme probably has good functionality for some organizations, for us it was just dull. Attempting to add colors or background images ended up looking cheap and tacky. We attempted using the client’s suggestion of using reclaimed woods phots as a background image which did provide quite a bit of aesthetic appeal but unfortunately gave the site a bit of an identity crisis. After several days of working with this particular model, we decided we needed to come up with something different.



Minimal Theme

We ended up finding the “New Standard” theme that seemed to have a little more of what we were looking for, particularly in regards to a shopping cart that kept a running total of the user’s purchases through the entire site. We decided to use a parchment style background to take some of the harsh white glare off of the background. We began work on importing all of the information, products, blogs and inventories from her Go Daddy site to the new Shopify site and tried to style it in a way that would give the site some personality. Unfortunately, despite the better suited template design that we had going, we still couldn’t find a way to add color or images to the site without it quickly becoming over stimulating and gaudy.



New Standard theme

After reviewing the site once the basic functionality was built, we considered attempting to build a theme from scratch using Shopify tools. Because we had encountered at least one fundamental problem using any theme we had previewed or worked with, we thought that perhaps building one ourselves would allow us to create a theme that would exactly fit needs of The Loving Paw instead of just mostly. However, after trying to find ways to recover the time that we would lose with this approach, we decided that it would be too labor intensive and may prevent us from finishing the rest of the necessary work for the project. Though we had concerns about the visual appeal and lack of the material on the site, we decided it was a good Minimum Viable Product to begin user testing and feedback on. Using that approach, we could figure out if our concerns were warranted or if we were essentially worrying about nothing.

It was also in this time period that began brainstorming about what we would want to do for the marketing and analytics portion of the project. We decided to go with Google Analytics as it provided a no-cost, user friendly approach that we could use with (and eventually turn over to) our client. For testing purposes, we put the tracking code into the Shopify site so we would be able to see the results of our upcoming user feedback tests. In addition, a separate tracking code was added to the existing Go Daddy site to establish a baseline metric to work off for comparison when the Shopify site goes live. We also began discussing ideas for email, paid and social media campaigns in the upcoming weeks.

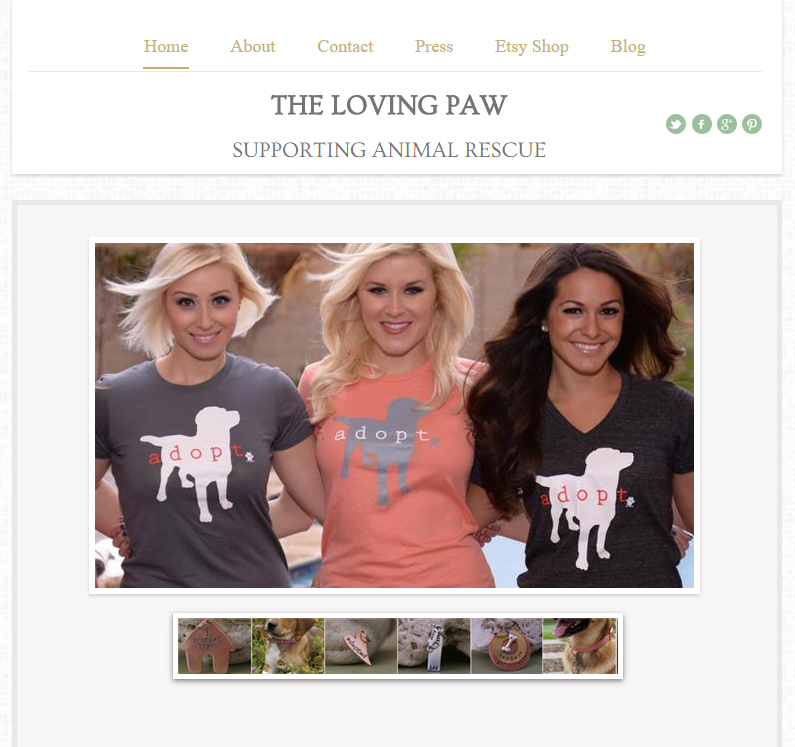
# v0.3

Our plans for release v0.3 were to get client feedback and go live with the site so that we could start Analytics testing sooner rather than later. We ended up starting off a bit rocky however as our meeting with Alexis to discuss her feedback for the initial site design and preparations to move forward was cancelled due to illness. Further attempts to set up the meeting were also derailed as the client’s illness extended into the next two weeks. This ended up being a blessing in disguise though as it forced us to do user testing with random end users instead of focusing on the client. Primarily our feedback was solicited through friends and family who were able to view the site with fresh eyes and offer us insights that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

The feedback we got was almost universal on both the likes and dislikes of the site. The people that looked at the site enjoyed the navigation aspects of the site, finding it easy to use. This was good for us to hear as it meant we didn’t need to focus as much time on the functionality of the site. Additionally, our feedback sample liked the accessibility and look of the site cart, commenting on the pervasiveness of throughout the site using the theme we had. With this cart, the total of the customer’s purchases would be visible and totaled from any page of the site so they could see what they were going to spend without constantly having to go to a cart page.

The opportunities for improvement we ascertained from our feedback users was even more helpful. The most common comments that we got from people was that the logo and the site itself was bland. Since we had started with a slate colored theme with minimal design additions, we decided that was a good place to start taking a closer look. One of the first things we realized that we were four men attempting to make a site designed for what we hypothesized was a primarily female audience. This led us to taking a different approach by asking what the users thought would be a good color scheme and how would they go about doing it. In addition, we leveraged help from several contacts who had previous web design experience. We attempted to salvage using the theme we already selected from Shopify using the new site color scheme suggestions and logo design, but were unable to as every theme has its own individual limitations. The team then studied new theme ideas that would allow us to achieve the more flexible color scheme and logo design that we desired and eventually selected the “Supply” theme and moving away from the “New Standard” theme. We were quickly able to put together a new site that utilized a nude and maroon color scheme and a logo that we thought would appeal to the customer base Alexis was going for. While we lost the original cart that many people liked, the new cart used an Ajax functionality that allows customers to view their whole order from a pop up screen as opposed to seeing a running total throughout the site. The new feedback that we received from the users that we showed the site to was positive with almost everyone remarking that the new site was much more pleasing to the eye and showed definite improvement in drawing the user in.

The second feedback bit that we got was that people didn’t have much idea of what The Loving Paw is or what they do. The original site had some very basic functionality that we were able to import to the new site with ease, but unfortunately didn’t say much to what the The Loving Paw mission was.



One of the things that we noticed in getting user feedback was that some people wanted to see more pictures of animals and some people wanted to just donate without buying anything. This led us to the realization that what people were looking for wasn’t an e-commerce site that promoted pet adoption, but a social community site that promoted pet adoption and had an e-commerce feature for users to buy unique products while getting news stories, learning about upcoming events or linking to similar organizations that promote pet adoption. As such we added “news and events” and “adoption resources” pages to the site in an attempt to give it more for the adoption community to experience at The Loving Paw and ideally lead to additional sales rates from satisfied users of the site.

The reaction to the new site designs was overwhelmingly positive with most people commenting on the liking the new color designs and site functionality. We decided to use this design to meet with the client once she was back to health and ideally go live with by the next release. This would also allow us to begin work on the analytics and marketing portions of the project that would allow us to begin the validated learning process.