

DIGITAL MAIN STEET
COMMUNITY COLLABORATION PROJECT

DMS **FUTURE PROOF**

Voice-Activated Marketplace Milton launches to support Main Street businesses

THE CHALLENGE

According to Statista, Canadian ownership of smart speakers like the Amazon Alexa Echo and Google Home increased from only 9% in 2018 to 25% in 2020. Combined with the improvements in voice assistants like Siri and Google Assistant on our smart phones, voice-activated search is becoming the first choice for information seeking among young adults and tech savvy seniors. Main street businesses face a huge challenge in moving beyond traditional search engine optimization (SEO) to find a way for consumers who are using voice-enabled search to become aware of their local business options.

While national chains and franchise operators may benefit from their head office launching a custom app, independent business owners generally lack the financial resources, digital expertise and/or marketing leverage to develop and promote their own voice-activated skill for Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant. How can small businesses increase the likelihood their information will appear in voice-activated search results? And how can they effectively reach consumers who want to support local businesses but also prefer to use voice when searching for options?

THE SOLUTION

In a Community Collaboration project led by the Milton Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Milton BIA, Haltech client and technology innovator, Qwhery Inc., leveraged support from Digital Main Street's Future Proof program to design and build a prototype business directory integration to their core Qwhery Cloud platform.



MARKETPLACE
MILTON

Marketplace Milton helps consumers find local businesses with an authoritative voice-activated skill for the Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa platforms. Users can interact with Marketplace Milton by asking for nearest businesses of a certain type (e.g bakery, cafe, insurance agent). Users can have the results emailed to them or sent by text message. They can also view the results on a map, get directions or receive a link to visit the website of the business they found.



KEY DELIVERABLES

- Created requirements planning document including target markets, core functions and features, project timeline
- Master database structure was defined; member business contact databases from the Chamber of Commerce and BIA were cleaned, de-duped and merged
- Conversation flows were designed, tested and refined
- Name research was conducted; skills were beta tested
- Logo and website were designed; a social media campaign was developed
- Prototype Google Action and Alexa Skill were released

THE IMPACT

The Marketplace Milton app provides an innovative way for BIA and Chamber businesses to be found by potential customers. It also amplifies the reach of the individual marketing efforts of member companies. By working together to embrace new technology and to help their members succeed, the Milton Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Milton BIA have created a more robust app that will be valuable to community users and member businesses. Marketplace Milton offers up-to-date contact information on over 700 small and medium companies representing over 4000 full-time employees in Milton.



NEXT STEPS

The Milton Chamber of Commerce will be spearheading a consumer marketing campaign to build awareness and encourage activation and trial of Marketplace Milton. The Chamber and BIA will also be hosting webinars to ensure member businesses are engaged in keeping their contact data up to date in Marketplace Milton.

The more the voice-enabled search app is used, the better it will become at learning the conversation flows and refining search results. Chambers of Commerce and BIAs who wish to collaborate on a local business directory app are invited to contact matt@qwhery.com.

SUPPORTERS

This Digital Main Street project was made possible through financial support from the Government of Canada through FedDev Ontario's Regional Relief and Recovery Fund.

A \$42.5-million investment from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and a \$7.45-million investment from the Government of Ontario brought together the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, Communitech and Invest Ottawa to expand the Digital Main Street Platform in order to support more businesses going digital in response to the impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario.

Haltech is a not-for-profit Regional Innovation Centre funded by the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Haltech provides entrepreneurial education, advisory services and strategic connections to technology start up and scale up companies in Halton Region to help them accelerate growth and bring innovations to market. Haltech was selected by Communitech as their delivery partner for the Digital Main Street Future Proof Program in Halton Region.

With the support of the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

