

Web site attempts to retain graduates

Trumpeting area's virtues may prompt them to stay

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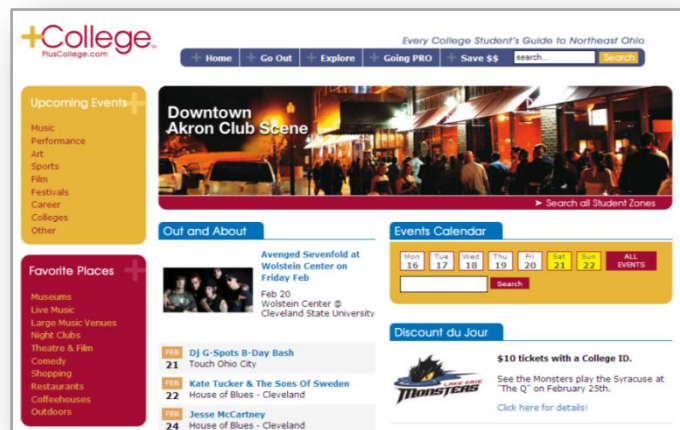
Is a Northeast Ohio college student more likely to stay in town after graduation if she's fallen in love with the park system, built fond memories at area entertainment venues, finished internships with local companies and created ties with people off campus?

A new Web site will test that theory.

Today, Cleveland Plus Marketing Alliance launches PlusCollege.com at <http://www.pluscollege.com>, aimed at 180,000 students attending 25 institutions.

The content is simple enough. A calendar of events, discount offers, and information on local internships were the top three requests of students surveyed by the site's designer, Boston-based Collegia.

Users can identify their school and get more personalized news and features, weather and links to a more localized schedule of everything from sporting and campus events to the bus schedule.



But making all of that information easily accessible can increase the chances that a student will explore the world beyond the school's borders, Collegia President Todd Hoffman said. "If they are isolated on campus and have no reason to connect with region or city, it's almost automatic that they would choose to leave," Hoffman said.

His 10-year-old company has been connecting colleges and communities to improve the economic well-being and vibrancy of both in places like Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Baltimore.

But PlusCollege is "the most advanced site we've done," he said. For instance, the calendar uses an algorithm that takes a database of 100 activities and spotlights the ones most likely to appeal to the targeted age group.

Hoffman said the desire to keep young professionals at home is not unique to Northeast Ohio. "Every region feels they could do better," he said.

But aggressive regionwide efforts to do something about it is a new trend, and Northeast Ohio is "in the front end of the wave coming across the country," he said.

And because college students are "very influenced by what they read, by what they think is a cool city," Hoffman said, then a Web site that helps them find a comfy coffee shop, an electric night life or valuable internships will help them see the grass is green on this side.

The George Gund Foundation provided \$40,000 for the project.

Rick Batyko of Cleveland Plus said the site has the support and input of the area's college presidents, and will use a grass-roots student council to help manage the site.

Meanwhile, Cleveland Plus is confident that a Web site launched last year to attract talent to the region is making an impact. In the past two weeks alone, ClevelandPlusLiving.com has had 1,328 unique visitors, Batyko said.

The most popular page after the home page: "Finding a Job."

The site was created so that recruiters, real-estate agents and human resource departments could send potential job seekers and clients to one site that would answer all their questions about what it's like to live in Northeast Ohio.

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