

PROMOTING YOUR COMMUNITY

# Love Northern BC Celebrates Local Entrepreneurs



BRIGHT IDEAS IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## SYNOPSIS

Love Northern BC provides marketing support and a prominent digital presence to help locals and visitors search for and find businesses based in one of Canada's most colourful regions.

## LOCATION

North Coast and Nechako, Cariboo, Northeast

## INNOVATORS

Love Northern BC



## BACKGROUND

Northern Development Initiative Trust's shop local program, **Love Northern BC**, spans 74 communities with more than 1,600 participating businesses that are all locally owned and operated. The program is powered by community champions around the region who provide support for the program and its businesses at a local level.

The program provides participating businesses with a prominent digital presence and community-based marketing support to showcase their region's shops, their owners and the diverse array of products and services they offer.

Not only does the platform create an easy way for locals and visitors to search for and find locally-owned businesses in the area, it also showcases some of the incredibly unique and eclectic businesses that characterize one of Canada's most colourful regions.



## THE CHALLENGE

**Love Northern BC** began as "Small Town Love", a Quesnel-based grassroots initiative that created an online platform showcasing local businesses so they could hold their own alongside chain stores and online competition. In 2013, less than 50% of small businesses in B.C. had any online presence, making the

need for such a program even greater. Northern Development Initiative (the Trust) committed funding and support to expand Small Town Love into a movement including 74 communities over vast distances. Through partnerships between the Trust and local community champions, the program has become **Love Northern BC** – the largest shop local program in Canada.



For more information, visit [gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment](http://gov.bc.ca/economicdevelopment)



## THE STRATEGY

Love Northern BC was designed to fill a need for online presence representing small businesses in the north, while also providing much-needed marketing resources. The digital platform encourages current and potential customers to connect with businesses using local product finders, links to social media channels, contact information, hours of operation and location. This information, along with first-rate photography and storytelling, makes each business easier to find online in a world that is increasingly reliant on digital resources.

When the Trust originally took on Small Town Love, the website was designed to support one community and 50 businesses. Since then, extensive work has gone into creating a new website that accommodates the growing needs of member businesses, community champions, writers and photographers.

“*Local businesses are the backbone of the economy in the North. Through the Love Northern BC platform, we are able to showcase the unique businesses that call our communities home.*”

– Joel McKay

CEO, NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE TRUST



## SUCCESSES

- In the past year, visitor traffic to the websites increased 16.4% - with a large-scale marketing campaign set for the spring of 2019, the Love Northern BC team hopes to see this increase.
- In 2017, 86% of web traffic originated from Canada; 80.6% percent from B.C. and 53% specifically from northern B.C.
- In 2018, Love Northern BC managed independent websites for 32 participating communities, presenting unique challenges for administration, maintenance and for cross-regional promotion.
- Love Northern BC is now housed on a single website that allows the opportunity to expand the program to smaller, unincorporated areas.



## LESSONS LEARNED

- In order to properly manage a network of 1,600 entrepreneurs, more than 40 community champions and 30 local photographers, it is **essential** to have the **proper infrastructure** in place.
- In 2017, 49.4% of web traffic came from mobile or tablet devices: this meant **optimizing the website for mobile** was of key importance.
- LoveNorthernBC.com includes more than 40,000 high resolution images. Until recently, these photography assets were hosted on Flickr, which presented unique challenges for photographers to access and upload. Now they are stored directly on the website, which provides **easier access for all users**.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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