



Inspiring Creativity

## Case Study Mermaid at Duxbury Bay

**Industry:** Retail

**Website:** [www.ShopMermaids.com](http://www.ShopMermaids.com)

**Application:** Serif WebPlus X2

**Organization Profile:** Mermaids at Duxbury Bay is a seashore-themed gift shop in southern Massachusetts that offers an eclectic mix of home décor, collectables, jewellery and kids' products. This small, family-owned and operated boutique carries many one-of-a-kind products created by local artisans.

**Summary:** Based in a historic coastal community near Plymouth, Mass., Mermaids at Duxbury Bay needed a way to reach out to customers ranging from residents in nearby communities to summertime visitors from around the world. Owner Cindy Nichols-Cheever said the store's website, created with Serif's WebPlus X2, has been instrumental in helping her attract new customers, increase sales and boost the shop's reputation.

### Website a Boon for Seashore Boutique

When searching for a name for her new retail gift shop Cindy Nichols-Cheever kept coming back to the word "mermaids." The mythical half-human, half-aquatic creatures captured the essence of her store that offers many whimsical seashore-themed items. The word was also as singular as she hoped her specialty shop would become.

"I try to find what other stores are not carrying," said Nichols-Cheever, who scours art fairs, museums and galleries for pieces and collections looking for new collections to carry in the store based on Massachusetts' south shore. "I try to get a good representation of local artisans."

She opened Mermaids at Duxbury Bay in 2005 with a single storefront and big ideas for sales. Soon, she was brainstorming ideas for [www.ShopMermaids.com](http://www.ShopMermaids.com), the store's website, with her accountant, part-time marketing advisor and friend Lisa DiVasta.

"The beaches in Duxbury attract visitors, but we're not like a Cape Cod town that could survive on tourism alone. The website was key to expanding my business," said Nichols-Cheever, who has worked in retail for more than 20 years and previously was a store manager for national retailer Crate & Barrel. "The website gives my business a solid reputation. Also, you reach so many more customers; it's almost like free advertising."

Neither Nichols-Cheever nor DiVasta had designed a website before, and while computer proficient, neither knew much about HTML or other Web technologies. A friend recommended Serif's WebPlus X2, Web design software that requires no previous programming or design experience. DiVasta said she was able to set up the entire website without reading the instruction manual. On-screen and online tutorials and step-by-step instructions also helped guide her.

"I'm impatient. I love computers, but I don't like to have manuals to slow me down. I thought WebPlus was extremely easy for someone who is not a designer to use," said DiVasta, who holds a marketing degree. "It was great because I could focus more on the content than the coding or the design."

DiVasta used WebPlus' "Lights On" template to get started with ShopMermaids.com because the blue and white colors perfectly complimented the shop's nautical-theme brand. DiVasta was able to choose from dozens of professionally-designed templates in WebPlus, or to create her own with aspects of several templates. From there, adding information and additional website pages that kept to a consistent style was quick work, she said. WebPlus' desktop publishing-style approach to Web design makes it as easy to create a full-featured website as it is to create a traditional, printed document.

"I wanted something very streamlined, almost rustic, and not frou-frou. It seemed to take Lisa no time at all to set it up," said Nichols-Cheever.

The integrated e-commerce features in WebPlus allow Mermaids at Duxbury Bay to do business online, selling select items with transactions processed by PayPal. Nichols-Cheever said she tracks purchases from across the country and the world, with customers in locales including California and England. Online sales account for approximately 10 to 15 percent of her store's total sales, although not every item is sold through the website, she said.

DiVasta uses WebPlus' built-in multimedia tools to help her regularly update the "store tour" section of the website with a photo slideshow of the latest in-store merchandise. It is important for customers to see the most current merchandise available, said Nichols-Cheever.

Visitors to the website can also click on a link to receive a monthly e-newsletter from the store. DiVasta is able to manage a mailing list of more than 400 subscribers using the easy-to-use, easy-to-manage WebPlus Smart Objects feature. The functionality is provided free by Serif.

Other pages on the site include a brief history of the shop and the area, contact information, hours and directions, monthly sales or in-store events and community information such as links to the area's chamber of commerce and local fund-raisers.

Using WebPlus' search optimization features, DiVasta was also able to add key words to encourage online search engines feature the site prominently in relevant search results.

After the website went live in 2006, Nichols-Cheever saw an uptick in sales and customer inquiries with questions ranging from asking about the availability of certain items to looking for directions. Many customers, especially cash-strapped consumers in the tight financial climate of 2008, researched items through the website before coming into the shop to make a purchase, she said.

The website was also a way to communicate with existing customers and stay – virtually – open for business during two shop moves during the past few years, Nichols-Cheever said. She was also able to connect, through the site, with local craftsmen who create one-of-a-kind items.

"I have a lot more interaction with my customers now," said Nichols-Cheever. "Many shoppers come into the store after finding it online. Once they come in, they tend to make a purchase."

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