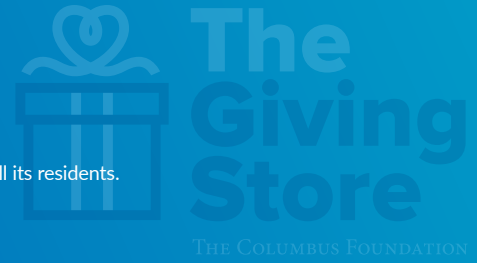




## ▶ CASE STUDY

# The Columbus Foundation



**MISSION:** To assist donors and others in strengthening and improving our community for the benefit of all its residents.

**INDUSTRY:** Philanthropy

**AWH OFFERING:** Enterprise Solutions, Web

**FOUNDED:** 1943

**SITE:** [columbusfoundation.org](http://columbusfoundation.org)

**COMPANY SIZE:** 11-50 employees

**COMPANY OVERVIEW** The Columbus Foundation is the trusted philanthropic advisor® to more than 2,500 individuals, families, businesses, and communities that have created unique funds to make a difference in the lives of others through the most effective philanthropy possible. More than 70 years strong, The Columbus Foundation ranks among the top ten community foundation in the United States.

**CLIENT SITUATION** The Columbus Foundation wanted to unify its existing website with PowerPhilanthropy®, a unique online marketplace designed to increase knowledge about the nonprofit sector and encourage charitable giving in central Ohio. Integrating the two sites was critical to delivering a digital user experience that meets stakeholder needs and fosters deeper levels of engagement. According to Joyce Ray, Associate Director, PowerPhilanthropy® and Knowledge Management at The Columbus Foundation, “Philanthropic organizations are often stuck between leveraging existing products that fall short of expectations, and not having the resources, time, or expertise to build new products in-house.” Ray continued, “To overcome these challenges, we began the search for a local development team that could help us create a world-class, integrated experience for both Foundation fund holders and the wider community.”

**PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT** The design of the new website would be led by long-standing partner FORT, a creative studio specializing in brand identity, graphic design, and web design and development. After a recommendation from FORT and a Request for Proposal process, The Columbus Foundation hired AWH to create a user experience that would meet three core objectives: drive operational efficiencies, provide market agility, and boost community impact. Ray shared, “Trust was a big part of why we selected AWH. Not only were they recommended by a respected partner, but they weren’t afraid to dream with us. Together with FORT, we worked very closely to create a user experience that aligned with the vision for the website.”

To begin, the team mapped the needs and primary paths of The Columbus Foundation’s target audiences – donors, nonprofit organizations, students, and the public. Ray explained, “Each audience has different needs and interests. A nonprofit may be looking for grant opportunities and public donors may be interested in participating in a Giving Day. We wanted to tailor content and provide a customized experience for each audience.”

Delivering a personalized user experience would require a powerful, yet easy-to-use content management system (CMS). According to John Finck, Lead Software Developer at AWH, “Umbraco is a huge feature of The Columbus Foundation project and makes it incredibly simple to manage and produce customized content to address user needs and interests.” He continued, “With Umbraco, The Columbus Foundation has the ability to curate every single word and image on the site without developer intervention.” AWH also advised The Columbus Foundation to move from Constant Contact to MailChimp and Mandrill integration, which would enable the organization to send

data-driven emails, including targeted and personalized one-to-one messages.

In addition to having varying needs and interests, every audience interacts with The Columbus Foundation differently. “We have users, such as donors and grant administrators, that never visit the ColumbusFoundation.org website; instead, they’re accessing our database through individualized portals,” explained Ray. “We needed to create consistency between the marketing site and portals to ensure every user has a world-class digital experience.”

The new website would also need to incorporate global search features. “The Columbus Foundation has a powerful database of content and information that needed to be updated and modernized,” explained Saad Kamal, Project Coordinator at AWH. He continued, “Using Apache Solr, we can concisely index all information, including external links, and consistently display search results in the site header. Now, no matter their need or access point, users can conduct searches from any page of the website.”

Global search has not only allowed users to easily locate scholarships and grants – opportunities once difficult to find – it has also contributed to the launch of The Columbus Foundation’s Giving Store. The Giving Store aims to deliver a dynamic ecosystem of information and opportunities for philanthropic community engagement. Users can search funds and organizations of interest, and The Columbus Foundation can weight search results to highlight more pressing, timely needs. “The goal of this project has been to enable effective philanthropy,” stated Ray. “Now, we can connect donors to what they care about and invite the public to support nonprofits and community needs.”





▶ CASE STUDY

# The Columbus Foundation



## BENEFITS

Since project completion, The Columbus Foundation has experienced the following benefits:



### EVOLVED SITE ARCHITECTURE

Before, The Columbus Foundation had two separate websites, [Columbusfoundation.org](http://Columbusfoundation.org) and [PowerPhilanthropy.com](http://PowerPhilanthropy.com). Today, The Columbus Foundation offers one, cohesive website with persistent, global navigation and consistent design. The site also includes a web API that provides a more organized manner to send and receive data to and from the database.

During the project, AWH also integrated fund and credit card management tools for donors to manage their giving; an interface for nonprofits to update their listing information and access transaction details; ScholarLink®, a database with more than 200 scholarship opportunities for students; and GO! Grants Online, an online grant application platform for nonprofits, with [Columbusfoundation.org](http://Columbusfoundation.org) to ensure a seamless user experience.



### STRONG COMMUNITY IMPACT

The new website showcases nonprofit organizations, funds, and urgent fundraising needs, and offers multiple ways to filter various giving opportunities. A browse-by-category path leads potential donors to areas of interest such as animal welfare, arts and culture, and the environment.



### EASE OF GIVING

The Nonprofit Directory offers a cleaner, streamlined design that makes compelling and useful information easy to locate. Donors can click on a nonprofit's listing for a quick synopsis of the organization before giving, receive suggestions for causes they care about, or click the Give Now call-to-action to donate.



### FASTER RESPONSE TIME TO COMMUNITY NEEDS

The Columbus Foundation can easily elevate timely community needs. The Giving Store includes a dynamic dashboard with customized content. Dedicated zones draw attention to *Better Together Projects* and include a visible countdown and real-time progress bar that fuels a sense of urgency. Donors responding to urgent needs have the option to make a credit card gift or grant through existing funds.



### INCREASED OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

The Columbus Foundation can easily update and refresh website content and promotions to address evolving needs and priorities. Ray stated, "No one wants to go to a developer for every change. When discussing project expectations, we made it clear that it was important for us to have control." She continued, "AWH understood why this was important and incorporated a content management system with incredible flexibility and customization."



### IMPROVED SECURITY AND SCALABILITY

AWH recommended that The Columbus Foundation transition from local to cloud hosting. This provided up-to-date and comprehensive security, as well as improved scalability. "With Microsoft Azure, The Columbus Foundation is no longer dependent on a local IT department to ensure security – all updates are made seamlessly," explained Finck. He continued, "Moving to the cloud also eliminated the possibility of server overload. This was particularly important for The Columbus Foundation because they host large-scale events, such as The Big Give, a 24-giving day." Azure also easily integrates with other Microsoft products, and provides The Columbus Foundation with detailed reports on server usage and performance at the click of a button.

