

Bo Hee Kim – project

I created a mobile platform for Richmond Confidential (RichCon), a hyperlocal news site run by the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. The website is richmondconfidential.org, and beta testing is mostly done for the iPhone, though not the Android (yet). Check it out on your mobile device. Here's a longer explanation of the project.

I created a mobile website because they are device agnostic – one version works for all mobile devices (unlike apps). HTML5 allows developers to build richer applications that can be supported on the web. Mobile sites are the future of news.

I led the project. All the functionality is my idea. It was coded by a developer I hired thanks to the McCormick Foundation's New Media Women Entrepreneur grant. The design is mostly mine, with some editing by a UI designer. Because RichCon uses WordPress as its content management system, and the theme it uses (CalPress) is used for many other sites, the mobile platform was implemented as a WordPress plugin.

There are three parts to the mobile site. The first part is called “Latest News” and it's simply designed for news consumption. The top five stories are stored locally on your device so you can keep reading even if you lose connectivity. The news is displayed with a headline and a big photo in list format. Instead of adding text-resizing buttons, you can spread your fingers on a paragraph and the font will increase while the text remains within the frame of your phone. By using gestures native to the mobile experience, we allow the user to do something intuitively without cluttering the interface with extra buttons.

There's also an event calendar. Trusted sources are given a URL where they fill out an event form. Once submitted, an editor can see it in WordPress where they normally do their editing. Once approved, the event shows up in the mobile site, where you can see it in list or calendar view. Event addresses link out to Google Maps.

Because there aren't many news outlets dedicating resources to covering Richmond, often the only time it shows up in the news is when something terrible has happened. RichCon attempts to show the city in a truer light by making also highlighting the positives and giving residents a voice. That's why this last feature, “Best Of,” is specific to this readership.

We asked the community for their favorite local hangouts. Instead of writing an article at the end of the year that would get lost in the stream of news, I geotagged all of the places and created an interactive feature similar to Yelp. We let you search what's nearby or view places by category. The idea is that when you're in Richmond, you should check out what the residents think is the best of the city. Like events, the address links out to directions.

By adding functionality to the mobile site, we add value beyond our content, enticing readers to return.