



CONTINUUM

# 826 Boston Takes Its Story Online

Nonprofits are often about hands-on interaction and physical output. They're also mission-driven. The work they do is meaningful, their office spaces may be lively and welcoming, and their members and volunteers may be deeply engaged. They are also often resource constrained, and figuring out how to express their capabilities digitally proves a challenge.

**On average, charitable organizations have about 15% of their gross revenue to devote to all overhead spending, and marketing is often the first cost to cut.<sup>1</sup>**

With a robust website being a significant marketing vehicle—and also no small expense—this online communication tool can be a productive one; roughly one in every five charitable organizations sees 20% of its gift revenue come through online.<sup>2</sup>

826 Boston is a not-for-profit volunteer organization with a mission to help children between 6 and 18 develop creative and expository writing skills. The

center, which opened in 2007, is housed inside a bright, modern space dubbed the Greater Boston Bigfoot Research Institute, which sells Sasquatch-themed merchandise and books written by 826 Boston student authors to benefit their tutoring programs.

Volunteer tutors work one-on-one with students, helping them with their homework across all subjects, and developing them into proficient writers by working with them on fiction narratives. With a staff of 8 employees and 4 service members, 826 successfully mentors thousands of children each year.

The staff did not, however, have unlimited overhead money nor a strong web developer to maintain an up to date, dynamic website, which would be a significant step in ensuring their ability to continuously secure funding.

In the summer of 2014, 826 Boston partnered with Continuum, a global innovation design consultancy, to redesign and rebuild their website. Continuum designers had previously created brand elements (a logo and imagery for print) for the organization, but 826 Boston was in need of a website redesign to truly bring their work to life.

The Continuum team, a multidisciplinary group of brand

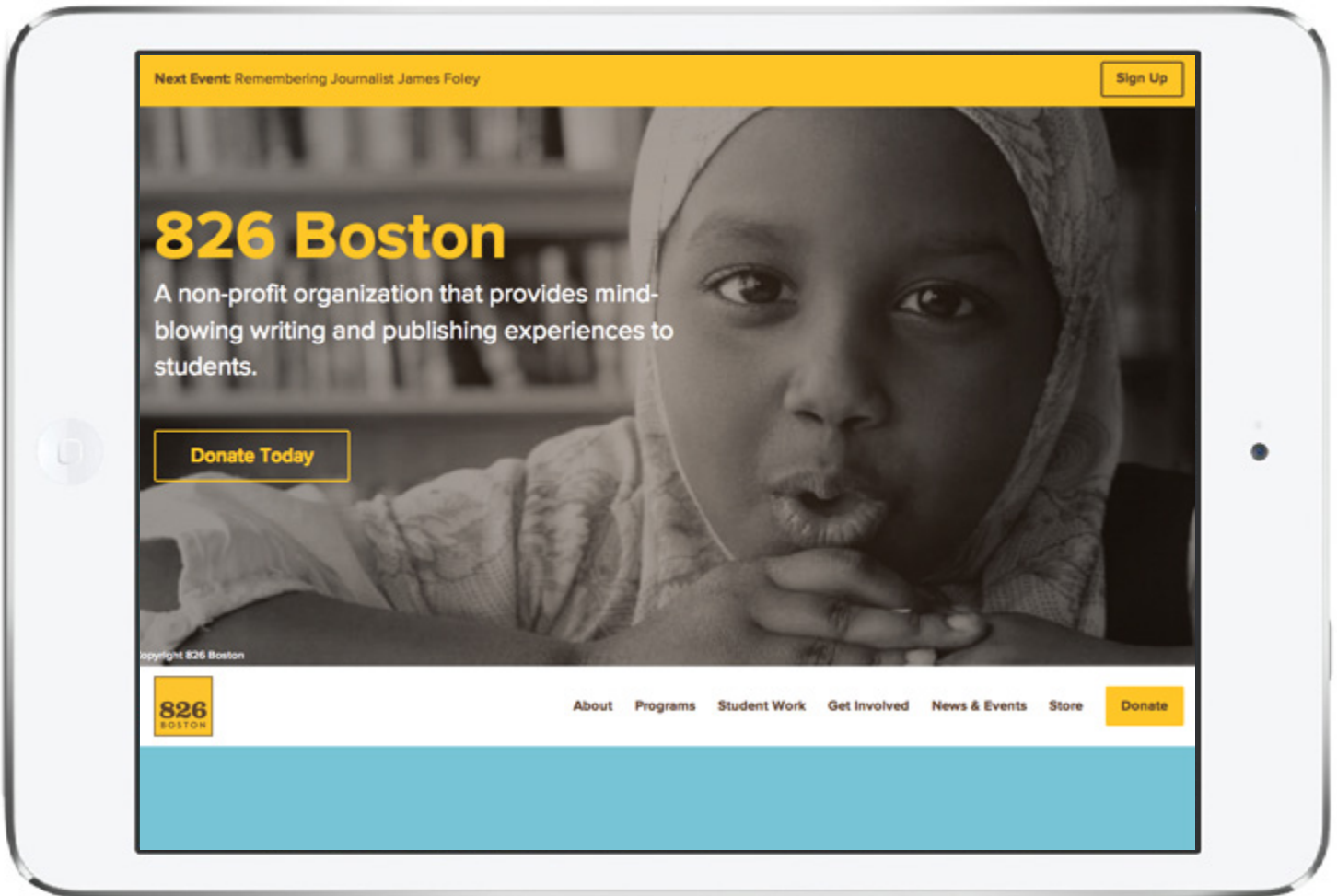


designers, digital UI and UX designers, illustrators, strategists, and software engineers, worked closely with stakeholders from 826 to understand what they were hoping to use their website to communicate and what actions they needed to inspire from their intended audiences. With access to the executive director and a marketing lead, the team was able to work closely and frequently with the business owners who would be most impacted by the changes.

During a stakeholder workshop at their offices, the 826 team voiced their concern that the old website did not articulate the stories they wanted to share. Potential donors were not driven to action; parents, students, and educators, who sought program information, were not being led to forms to sign up; and current volunteers could use the site to sign up for upcoming working shifts, but there were no compelling messages to inspire new

people to join the organization.

**At the core, the 826 Boston website was not showcasing the organization's unique offering. It talked about the compelling work being done, but there was an opportunity to leverage stories from the students to actually show it.**



The site housed older content, while 826 was creating fresh, compelling content all the time; the team curates a robust Tumblr page, maintains a Facebook account, and began leveraging Instagram that summer. None of the content from their social properties was represented on the main website.

The Continuum team approached this website redesign following a chronology common for technology development projects. They first gathered technical requirements by understanding the technology and any third party services being used and then evaluating the best technology to support the new iteration of the site. They assessed the current site, looking at both design and content. To find a balance of information, they sketched out a content architecture, including the existing material as well as new content that should be included. In collaboration with their client, they sketched

out ideas and created wireframes, increasing their fidelity with each round of revisions. When concepts met approval, the site was coded. 826 employees were able to upload content, the site was tested for resolution of any final bugs, then Continuum secured a webhosting server and pushed the site live.

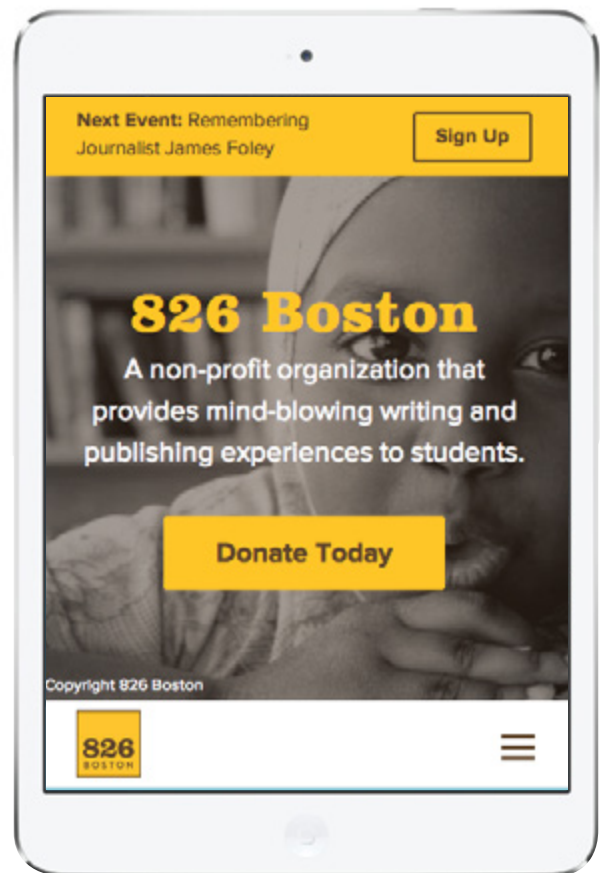
Continuum's cross functional team brought a fresh perspective and somewhat unique approach to the 826 Boston web redesign project; the entire project team was present throughout the needs identification, ideation, and development processes. This meant that Continuum designers and developers worked together from the beginning, having ongoing discussions about site content and functionality, which led to iterative discussions around requirements.

Electrical and software engineers at Continuum approach

projects by learning about the context for which they are designing software. Having them present for content discussions with the 826 Boston team allowed Continuum to work as one cohesive project team who could prioritize technology requirements based on importance and difficulty.

Early discussions made it clear that Wordpress would be a smart platform upon which to build the new website. A commonly used content management system (CMS) and blogging platform, Wordpress leverages a fairly straightforward user interface. Ease of use was important, as 826 staff members, who did not have web development expertise, would need to upload content—student writing samples, information about events, and updates to programs, for example. The availability of plugins and widgets, Wordpress add-on tools created by independent developers, also offered more flexibility, allowing Continuum to build a website with more dynamic and custom functionality. In some instances, out of the box plugins accomplished this work, and in others, software engineers modified existing code or wrote new code to accommodate more complex features. Creating page-specific search pages and designing a rotating gallery of student work posts to serve new, fresh stories to repeat visitors of the site are two examples of increased functionality that was designed to support more custom interactions.

**The newly designed 826 website launched in the spring of 2015. Built on a platform 826 can manage on their own and grow with, the website offers a dynamic experience for visitors. Student work permeates the site, giving readers a more experiential picture of the impactful work 826 volunteers do.**



## 129 Stories

129 original stories and poems are produced at each 826 Boston event or workshop on average.

[View Events](#)

## 93% Increase

93 percent of students reported becoming better writers as a direct result of working with 826 Boston

[Volunteer](#)

(1) <http://dowser.org/seven-reasons-why-nonprofits-wont-spend-money-on-marketing/>

(2) <http://philanthropy.com/article/The-Big-Boom-in-Online-Giving/139965/>