



A Vermont based hiking spa and retreat needed fresh branding and a new website fast because a prestigious award was soon to be announced.

*Evolve Systems has been providing easy-to-use platforms allowing companies to manage their own websites and merchant processing services to customers nationwide since 2002.*



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## New Life Hiking Spa: A Case Study

By Teresa Guerin

Evolve Systems recently had the opportunity to work with New Life Hiking Spa, an all-inclusive, affordable destination spa and wellness retreat located in the Green Mountains of Vermont. New Life has been in business for nearly 40 years and they are considered a pioneer in the destination spa industry. This past July, Travel + Leisure crowned them the #1 Destination Spa, which spurred their need to do a brand and web presence refresh – *fast*.

Due to the massive amounts of publicity that would be coming to New Life after the T+ L award announced, they knew they wanted to have a fresh, up-to-date, wow presence that was well-branded. Since the destination spa industry is very competitive, it was important that they matched and exceeded what their competition was doing online.

New Life wanted to separate themselves by branding as a *Vermont* spa with different features than California or Arizona spas. Not surprisingly, a majority of the other spas nominated in Travel + Leisure's Destination Spa category are based out of California and Arizona. New Life knew they wanted to market and brand themselves as a spa that has a 'get-away', with a woodsy, outdoorsy feel to it – that also offers exceptional, healthy meals. The fact that they have been in business for almost 40 years also speaks to their longevity and superior visitor experience.

### Starting Point

While this was an extremely exciting project for Evolve Systems to be a part of, the tight timeline the Travel + Leisure Awards provided certainly put the pressure on our staff. Here are the four main things New Life Hiking Spa knew before the project got underway:

1. They knew they were winning the Travel + Leisure award
2. Their branding hadn't been touched in 40 years
3. They knew their current site was not mobile-friendly
4. They knew they were non PCI-compliant. Being PCI-compliant is much more secure for payment processing because it reduces New Life's risk when accepting credit cards– which they do a lot of.

*New Life Hiking Spa is a Vermont wellness destination location recognized by Travel + Leisure as 2016 #1 Destination Spa in the U.S.*



*We couldn't be happier. We really needed an updated, fresh website. We had a record season this year and know the website was a part of our success. -- Jimmy and Kathleen Lesage, Owners, New Life Hiking Spa*

Once the project began, Evolve Systems was able to provide the following services:

1. A web presence industry audit and strategy sessions
2. A logo re-design
3. A special design for New Life's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary
4. Web development work
5. Google Analytics integration for marketing ROI

## Interviews with the Project Team:

### Server Security

I first spoke to Don Raleigh Sr. to learn more about the special server he set up for New Life to prevent their site from crashing due to the large amounts of foot traffic he anticipated. Don put CloudFlare in front of a LAMP stack server with CentOS. CloudFlare is a DNS that takes all traffic requests and distributes them.

When I spoke with him – in the last month, over 880,000 visitors has been to New Life Hiking Spa's website without it crashing, and their site received over 200 individual threats that were all squashed – so it's safe to say the system Don put in place was very effective.

The biggest challenge Don faced during this process was “the unknown.” He quarreled with whether the system he put in place would be too much or too little for the client's needs. His estimates were right on target.

### Project Management

Next I spoke with Jordan Hann, our Project Manager at Evolve Systems.

This project was unique in that it had an especially short time frame in which it had to be completed. The main lesson Jordan took away from this project, was how to make sure to get everyone to meet their deadlines in order to get the project done on time. She also made changes in the copydeck worksheets, used to capture content, image and resource links for the development team, so the expectations for clients were more clear in the future. The tight timeline also caused Jordan to be involved in the audit and strategy sessions, which she general doesn't do. But because there was no margin for error, she participated in these meetings to ensure clear communication with the client. There was also a lot of new talent involved in the project which naturally created a challenge.



*New Life Hiking Spa hikers taking a break to enjoy the beauty Vermont has to offer.*

Jordan is most pleased with the design and she is proud that the team was able to hit the deadline. She appreciates the cooperation this took from everyone on the team, especially those on the team who put in overtime to get the project done. She also enjoyed working with a unique client – an award-winning destination spa. The biggest accomplishment for Jordan though is that the client is happy with the final results.

## Design

I spoke to designer James Rahn to learn about his challenges and triumphs during this project. Like Jordan, working on such a tight timeline was the biggest challenge. James explained that he had to have the client decide on a brand very quickly, so that way he could get to work on designing the website itself. Much to my surprise, the fact that New Life's branding hadn't been updated in 40 years actually worked out in James' favor when it came time to create a brand identify for New Life. It meant he didn't have to untangle anything from the past, he could basically start from scratch. Since technology has changed so much in the 40 years New Life has been in business, he had to consider designing a brand for them that would be serve multiple platforms and promote consumer engagement in a way their business had never done before.

From a designer's perspective, James is most pleased with the positive reception from consumers have conveyed for the new website and branding of New Life. The widespread viewership that came from winning the Travel + Leisure award was also exciting because it brought great exposure to the beautiful design James created for them. The widespread viewership promoted New Life in a way that consumers can finally engage and identify with.

## Development

New Life's website was built in WordPress and featured an Ecwid E-commerce Shopping cart. The brains behind all of this development work was Evolve System's Lead Technician, Jon Elfstrum. In between the many projects he's juggling, I was able to sit down with Jon for a few minutes and learn about what went into the technical portion of this project.

Jon highlighted the reservation feature and the rotating quotes from notable periodicals as the top functionalities on the site.

The main challenge for Jon was the fact that it was a rush job. In the future Jon said would get the DNS switched over ahead of time, rather than waiting until the last minute. Another challenge occurred when low-resolution images were initially integrated. Replacing all the photos was time consuming but essential.



WordPress was a good solution for New Life because the client wanted to be able to modify content often and they also wanted a blog easily accessible. Jon integrated Ecwid, an ecommerce shopping cart that's available as a plug-in within WordPress.

### Customer Testimonial

In between winning a huge national award, being nominated for a bunch more and making an appearance on the Today Show, I had a chance to talk to Kathleen Lesage, owner of New Life Hiking Spa. To no surprise, Kathleen has received an overwhelming amount of compliments on the new website and refreshed brand. So much so that they've lost track of all of the positive feedback.

For Kathleen the biggest challenge during the web refresh process was simply finding time to focus on project, while also running a growing business. This is very common occurrence when a project is ownership led.

She enjoyed working with the team at Evolve Systems very much and is most pleased with the look and feel of the website and branding. During our conversation, Kathleen joked how she's finally able to give out New Life's domain and invite people to visit their website without being embarrassed. For Kathleen, her favorite functionality of the site is having a built-in blog because she loves having the capability to share her posts and delicious recipes to all of New Life's social media outlets from one spot. It was clear through our brief conversation that the web and brand refresh resulted in everything she could have hoped for.

While this project presented many challenges to the team here at Evolve Systems, it has been extremely rewarding being able to watch the praise New Life has been receiving in the media. With their new website and brand identity, we're sure their success will only continue to grow.

It is time to contact [Evolve Systems](#).

*Evolve Systems is dedicated to "Adapt. Act. Evolve." and known for our 5-step approach – Strategy, Design, Build, Market, and Support. We specialize in two business verticals: Merchant Processing/Electronic Payments and Content Management (CMS) Web development, which intersect in e-commerce websites.*

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Please contact our sales department at 651-628-4000 if you have any questions or would like a sales consultation.

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