



COUNTRY CLUB

**The Willard Companies, LLC
The Water's Edge Website**

Research: For years, The Water's Edge, owned by The Willard Companies had an established identity at Smith Mountain Lake (SML) as the premiere private golf, lake and country club community. After investing in a \$5 million renovation of the course, The Willard Companies set out to find an inexpensive way to get the community more national exposure as well as add value to its private membership.

A previous research study of several focus groups revealed that while 94 percent of those surveyed were familiar with The Willard Companies, The Water's Edge had become just another of their communities. On the current Willard Companies website the link to the community was one of several choices and did not visually generate the interest due a golf course ranked #3 in Virginia by *Golf Digest* or honored as one of the country's top 50 golf communities by *Luxury Golf Homes Magazine*.

The Willard Companies enlisted the help of long-time marketing partner GO Agency to research how to keep The Water's Edge relevant and communicate more effectively with its members. A study of comparable communities across the nation found that most upscale communities featured their own web sites which highlighted the lifestyle of the communities and featured services for their members. The Willard Companies decided to develop a stand-alone website specifically for the community.

Planning: The website needed to serve two purposes. First, it needed to be well designed and appealing to potential real estate clients using the site to browse club amenities and search for a new home. Second, the site required easy navigation for the community member who would want quick access to community schedules, the monthly newsletter and member dues. The team also needed to prepare a plan to launch the site to the community itself and provide incentives for members to use the new internet resource. Another key part of the planning was the visual appeal of the website. It needed to convey a sense of the community, compete with the look of other sites for similarly prestigious communities, and it needed to stay within a reasonable budget. To do this, the web team decided that they would need to move away from the previously established look of The Willard Companies. Due to the member audience, clarity in the navigation was an additional, and vital, goal.

Execution: The new website, (www.TheWatersEdgeCC.com) was scheduled to launch on June 19th, in concordance with the community's renovation. The web team began developing the site on May 5th and it was launched June 8th. The design team made a drastic departure from the standard company look and chose elegant fonts, gold and black colors and crisp, straight edges on the photos instead of the traditional, rounded borders. The navigation was well defined and placed near the top of the page. Photo selections were chosen to highlight the beauty and unique design of the course and

used in rotating flash banners on each page. Every section of the site was evaluated for its aesthetic value or function. The site also featured a photo gallery, making use of the gorgeous library of photography taken of the golf course. For those shopping for a new home, links to the floor plans were added to the bottom of the homepage where they would be easy to find, yet not cumbersome for members using the site. To encourage members to use the site, the design team created a members-only section where they could log in to access their current statement, archived statements, monthly food minimum balance, and credit book balance, as well as the monthly newsletter for the community.

The launch of the site was announced internally through the club newsletter, as well as through an aggressive Pay-Per-Click campaign. Search options were customized to increase views by home shoppers looking for private golf community residences. The web development team conducted a link building program encouraging area realtors to highlight the site. The cost of the website was \$2,000, hosting is \$248 per year and \$1,500 was spent per month in Google™ advertising through the peak season.

Evaluation: The result was a strikingly different site from the previous look, and a site that was extremely easy to navigate and use. Campaign success was measured in terms of member satisfaction and online participation. After the launch, 288 members of the community of 461 began accessing their monthly statements and the other features online. In addition to the 62 percent of the community who signed up for the online features, 375 of the 461 completed a survey conducted via SurveyMonkey.com. Results indicated that 90 percent of those members were completely satisfied with the web site. Success was also measured in site traffic, indicated by the graphics below.

