GREG.CH

Full-Service Web Development

CASE STUDY: TRUEVISUAL

- Website Summary -

This website was developed by Swiss web developer Greg Lemmenmeier (Website | CV). Work done was:

44 webpages (English/German), 272 photo pages with captions, and 83 specially programmed functions. Pitching vs. 4 other web designers, client consulting, developing the detail concepts (– for website navigation, layouts, texts, logo, SEO), database programming + filling, programming a custom bi-lingual CMS for this website, designing business logos, selecting the best photos, copywriting, translations, optimizing each photo (smallest format / best quality), multimedia animation, dynamic three-sector sitemap, custom Admin System to edit menus/pages/galleries/photos/admins, performance charts, WYSIWYG editor, site color editor, site logo switcher (to compare logos), auto-generator stationery auto-generator (PDF files), selective EXIF data reader, photo uploader incl. auto-resize/compress, PHP-generated CSS stylesheet incl. CSS 3 styles, print stylesheet, negotiating and purchasing the .com domain from a previous owner, SEO based on methods of year 2010, Google Site Map, Under Construction page with a custom designed Flash animation and music, website installation. Design and text development of several advertising flyers and gift certificates. Design of business cards and letterheads.

This site was made with PHP 5, MySQL 5, HTML ("valid website"), CSS 3, Flash.

Organizing the Content

As the given content was divided into **3 very different sectors** (Reportage/Fashion/Baby photographs), I developed a solution to structure the website accordingly. While it's generally not advisable to insert a so called "splash page" (introductory page to a site), it was necessary in this case because the target audience is divided into 3 different groups, each with different interests: As visitors, magazine editors are interested in the "Reportage" sector, models only in the "Fashion" sector, and expecting mothers only in the "Baby" sector.

Therefore, I designed an introductory page that clearly **leads each group towards their area on the website**. Also, I assigned a different color to each sector: Dark slate blue for "Reportage", a special shade of red (mauve) for the "Fashion" sector, and light blue - a traditionally used color for the "Baby" sector. The idea included to **also use these colors in the navigation menu** to visually differentiate the site areas for visitors:

While this color-coded navigation system was very user-friendly, logical and visually pleasing, it generated a huge problem that is often overlooked by other web designers:

An **introductory page with hardly any text on it** is very bad for SEO (=Search Engine Optimization). The reason is that when Googlebots visit a site to index it for Google Search, the Googlebots absolutely need enough text on the homepage (= first page of the website). And a good web developer will ensure that this text contains many relevant (as determined by careful analysis) key words and key phrases – also called "SEO copywriting".

With this website, however, this **seemed impossible**: I could not just add lots of keyword-filled text underneath the 3 photos (Reportage/Fashion/Baby), as doing this would have destroyed the clean and uncluttered look.

I finally found a reasonable solution which was to use "Flash" for the 3 photos, and then to **include keywords right into the small Flash movies** (i.e. revolving photos). Since Google does index texts embedded inside Flash movies, this solution would lead to an indexing of not just 3 words and a Copyright note, but also the valuable keywords that I embedded such as "*Journalism, Reporter, Events, News, Humanitarian, Model, Beauty, Portrait, Cover, Sedcard, Agency, Child, Parents, Family, Birth, Pregnancy*". All of these are very **realistic search keywords** for the types of photography that this website offers – and for potential clients:

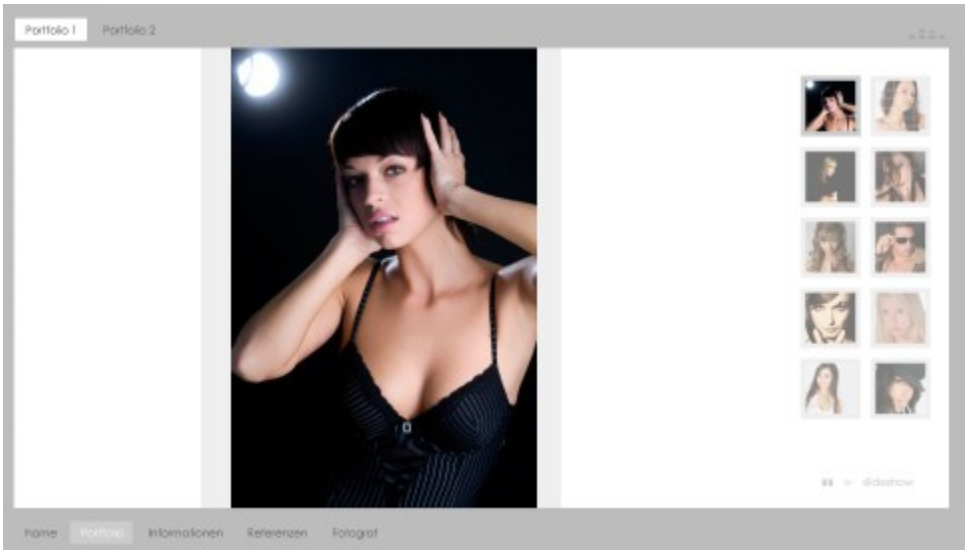
This would lead to **better Google Rankings (and traffic/more clients)** as the **first page** of the site now had all components required to be **indexed meaningfully** – despite of it being a splash page with just bits of text.

I selected the best photos for the start page, and selected **engaging keywords** based on my research.

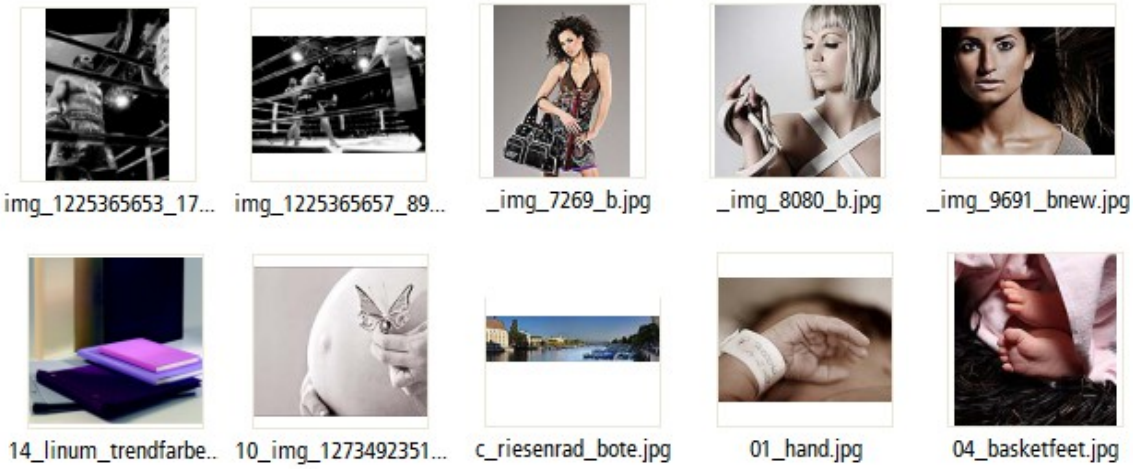
Also, I designed a unique/attractive cross-fading effect (inside-out "camera flash") in the 3 photo animations. Unfortunately, the client decided after the website's launch to have someone else remove these essential, Flash-embedded keywords from the start page. This resulted in a start page with almost no text for Google to index, which, from an SEO point of view, is a blunder and hinders the site's success. But, as always, it's the client who makes the decision. And that's why my own website said right in its title: "Your concept. Your site."

Organizing the Photos

The next roadblock came in the form of **differently formatted photos** that I now somehow had to integrate **consistently into the website and program a CMS for**. When you look at other photographers' websites, it's clear that the majority of them have their online photos in the exact same format – **example** ***profifotograf.ch****:*



However, this was different. The high-res, large photos received on CD-ROM were in **very different formats**:



When programming a CMS, the photos (e.g. product photos in an e-catalog) have a more or less consistent format or width/height relation. But here, **they come in all shapes** – wider than high, higher than wide, almost square-shaped, more than square-shaped, very narrow etc. It did not help, at this point, that most photographers with websites have their online photos in the exact same format.

From the client's artistic point of view, it was understandable that photos must not be changed. But at the same time, I needed a solution to position them consistently within the webpages – and also in the preview galleries that are part of the navigation system. My solution was to use **CSS to "clip" preview images** without, of course, clipping the full-size photos. This solution resulted in menus and thumbnail galleries with photos that at least **appear to be shaped the same** while they actually still have very different width/height relations:

In order to better organize the baby photographs and make the menu items appeal to soon-to-be mothers, I suggested that **menu items should be named** in a somewhat poetic fashion, like "little sunshine", "discovering the world", "everything's new" or "look who's crawling". The client then chose menu items such as "We grow".

The solution of structuring the preview galleries with 4 photos per row was not a coincidence. It was better than 3 or 5 – when I analyzed the received content, I noticed that many galleries had numbers divisible by 4.

Resizing the full-view Photos

The next step was to make the full-size photos (received as high-resolution large files on CD-ROM) smaller so that they could fit into the website. This again was difficult because programs such as Photoshop, and about 8 others that I downloaded and tested for this task, simply cannot "batch process" this type of photos in one go and get the required results: The batch-resizing functions of these programs only work for a defined width/height relation, but not for **resizing based on the maximum width** and then calculating the required height % for each of the differently formatted photos. Since the batch processes failed, I programmed a little PHP/MySQL system that calculated, resized, compressed (JPG 80), and overwrote each of the 272 photos.

To make them look more attractive in the webpages, I added a very soft, elegant drop-down shadow to them:

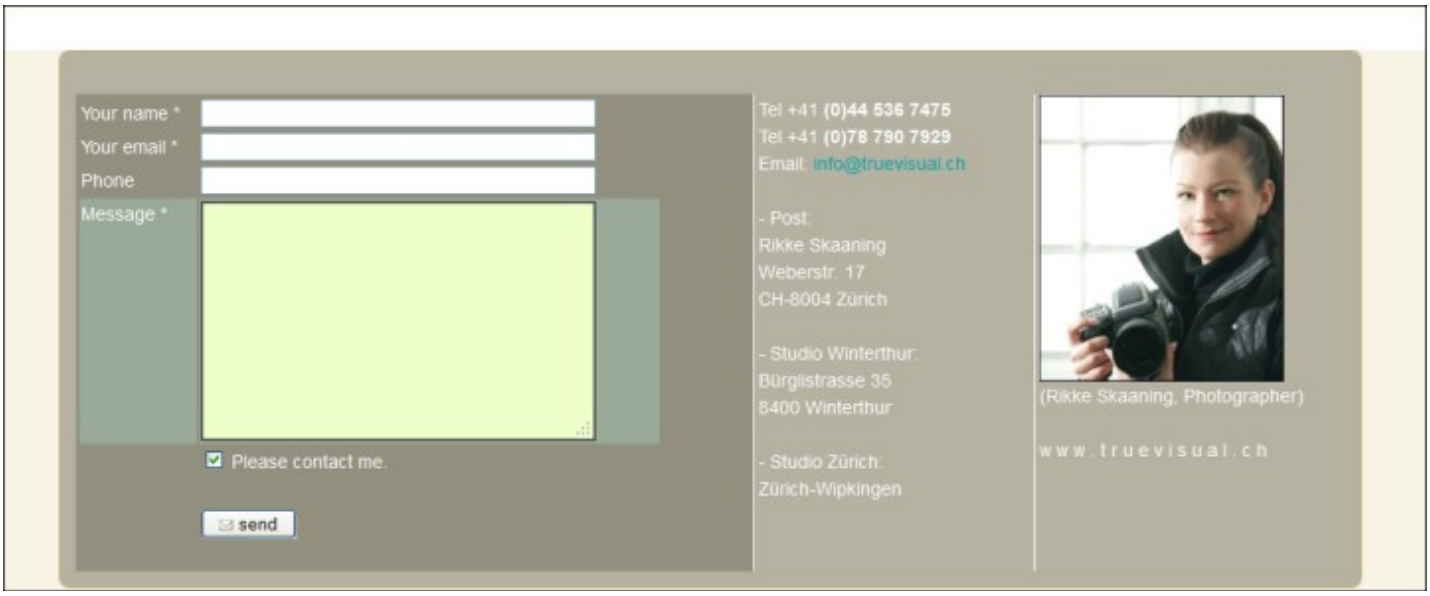
This worked very well and the client said it looked stunning. I added functions to **highlight the selected photo** within the menu by adding a frame in the same color as the website sector, and functions to forward to the next photo. With this system, the user can **both** browse through all the photos or click on them in the menu.

Text Development

Since the client is of Danish origin, the texts I received for the website needed **lots of corrections** in wording, appeal, and grammar. I corrected / improved them and **translated** some of the webpages for this website.

Contact Form

Since this photographer offers a service that is both **personal and trust-based**, I figured that the contact page should also be "personal" and show the portrait photo: Potential clients who send a message should see who receives it. Also, I designed a 3-column structure (like the 3 website areas) to present all of the info:



Three Sector Sitemap

To make website navigation as clear as possible for users, and also offer them direct access to each of the photo galleries, I programmed a special sitemap that shows the 3 sectors **in parallel** and highlights the sector in which the user currently is. In compact form, this sitemap offers direct access to all pages, all photo galleries, and even a **direct access** to each photo page. "Multi-sector websites" are often confusing for users – unless a solution like this is developed. Also, the sitemap itself contains a **sitewide search engine**:

Other components developed:

- "**.htaccess**" file with a "301 redirect" to **prevent Google's "double content penalty"** if "www." and "http://" This file also blocks out some hacker stuff e.g. bad bots, base64 strings, script strings, and bad host IPs.

- "**robots.txt**" file. Special solution: Do not index the folder "/logo". All Javascript and CSS files are exluded.

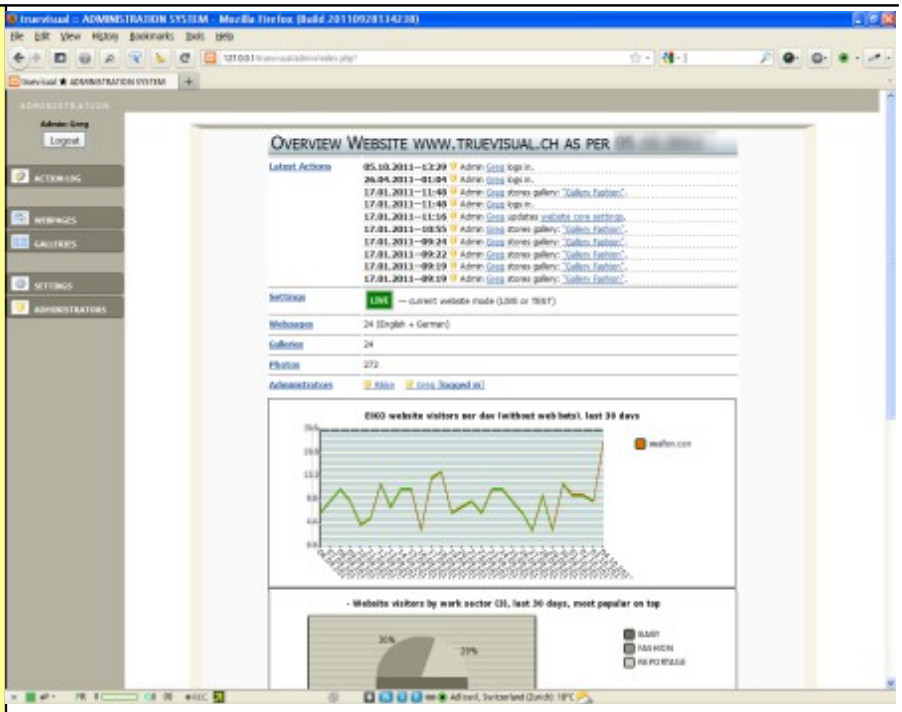
- "**sitemap.xml**" file, Wrote Google Site Map with 12 links, DE/EN version. Carefully prioritized all the links. For this website, it would be a bad idea to index each of the 272 photo pages, Google does not like that.

- "**favicon.ico**". Bookmark icon for users. Tried to get a "T|V" (for TrueVisual) into the tiny 16x16px format.

The Administration System

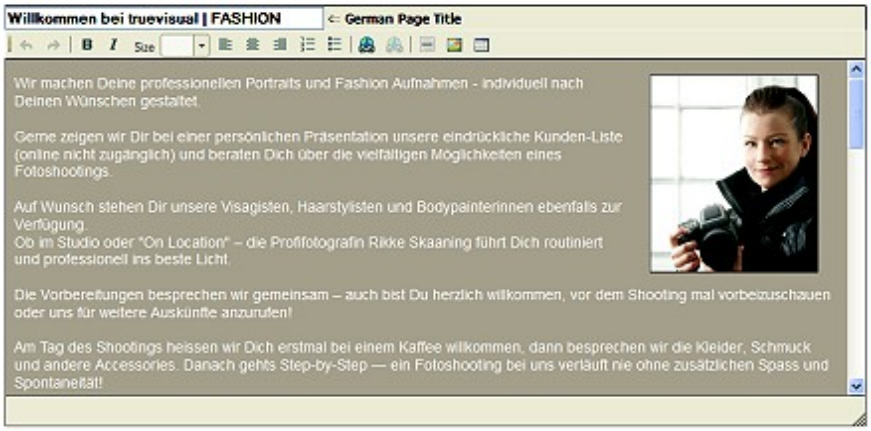
For this site, I **custom-developed** and tailored an **easy-to-use** system for the website administrator (client). With this system, she can edit the website and also monitor its performance.

After she logs in as Admin, she sees an **automatically updated overview:**
- Log of the 10 latest admin actions
- Statistics (total pages, galleries, etc.)
- List of currently active administrators
- **Chart of visitors p. day** (last 30 days)
- **Chart of sectors** (Rep./Fash./Baby)
- Info on webhost (and contact person)
- Info on who developed this website
- Info on technologies used (with links)
- Info on how to operate the AdminSys
- Useful tools, e.g. to see all backlinks



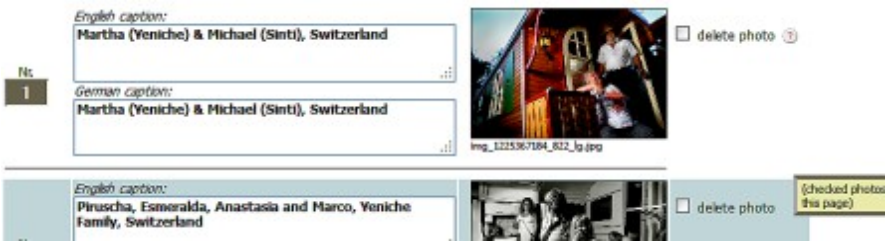
- **Compact and self-explanatory** system
- 13 different Administrator pages
- Sytem designed similar to website
- Written in English (client is Danish)

- **All necessary functions to edit site**
- **Very clear** add/edit/delete actions
- **English and German on same page**
- **Confirmations** before any deletions
- **Logs with precise texts** (who + what)

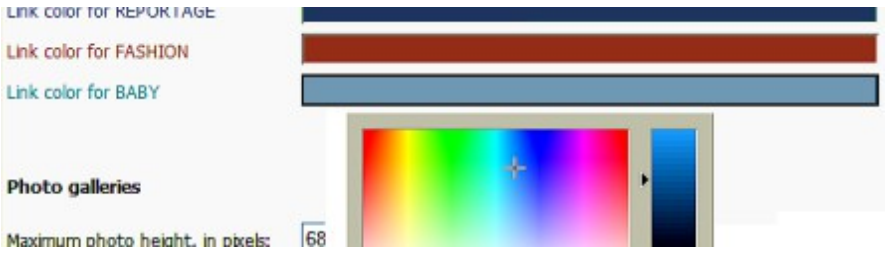


- **Webpage editor** = custom adapted
- Admin previews in -true- WYSIWYG
- No pointless formats (e.g. underline)
- Editor uses same styles as website, e.g. white text on beige background

- Made for client = no cryptic language
- IP addresses stored, links to WHOIS
- Clear user feedback (anim. "loader")



- **Special edit**: Organize the 3 sectors
- Special upload of photos for galleries
- Auto-resizing/compressing photos
- Change display sequence of photos
- Edit the D/E caption for each photo
- See "EXIF" infos embedded in photos



- All website settings can be edited
- Switch "Test/Live" (launch by client)
- Special **color editor** for 3 site sectors
- Editor for SEO tags, keywords (D/E)
- Including links to SEO analytics tools

- **Admin accounts** (add/edit/delete)
- Master and Assistant Administrators
- Notification (auto-emails) for changes
- Shows last login, real name and email

Logo Design

This was again not easy because the client had, in the project brief, stated clear requirements for the logo: Colors such as pastel green or dark pink, perhaps metallic effects (chrome or gold), and must use gradients.

The logo text should be all in small caps ("truevisual" not "TRUEVISUAL"), it had to include the name of the photographer and the tagline "Rikke Skaaning Photographer". Also, it should appear to all target audiences: **Magazine editors** (for the "Reportage" sector), **models and agencies** (for the "Fashion" sector), and **soon-to-be mothers** or parents (for the "Baby" sector). In addition, it should also **"be timeless"** which normally means:

Not too modern! And the logo should convey the fact that the photographer is female, it had to look feminine.

The first problem I found and discussed with the client was the name itself: Truevisual, in my opinion, did not make much sense. In marketing, "a visual" means "an image". But photographers produce many images, so "true visuals" makes more sense, if any. Or truly visual? I doubted that the chosen name would be successful.

I started by designing 3 logos that emphasize the first letters "t" and "v" – to make this name rememberable:

Thus it was clear that writing as "TrueVisual" would be more memorable than "truevisual" or "TRUEVISUAL".

During the development phase, I then designed/presented more logos. Since the client had told me that she will in the future **mostly work in Baby Photography**, and she had expressed her (new) color preferences, I designed feminine logos that appeal to **expecting/pregnant mothers** – and convey "**trust/growth/love/life**":

Marketing Collateral

When I designed the business cards, gift certificates, letterheads, and various flyers for the client's business, I tried different versions until the client liked them. During this phase, it became clear to me that it's not very smart to write "**Rikke Skaaning Photographer**" because most people are unfamiliar with Danish names and might not clearly see which part the name is – or they could even read it as "Scanning" (into a computer). My solution was to make it **clearer to understand** by writing "TRUEVISUAL - **Photography by Rikke Skaaning**"

As for the **flyers** (several of them), the texts I received from the client could not be used to effectively address the target group. **I rewrote all the texts to include action words, be "authentic" and resonate with the reader.**

I put extra efforts in designing with pleasing proportions, and in making the end of each line **perfectly aligned.**

All marketing collateral was professionally produced, i.e. with crop marks and in the "Adobe Indesign" format.

Other work done

When analyzing the texts received for the webpages, it occurred to me that they had the German form "Sie" to address users **in all 3 sectors** of the website. I suggested to use the less formal German "Du" for the "Fashion" sector because models are typically addressed by their first name, not their last. In contrast, the more formal "Sie" should be used in the sectors "Baby" and "Reportage". The client agreed, and I changed it.

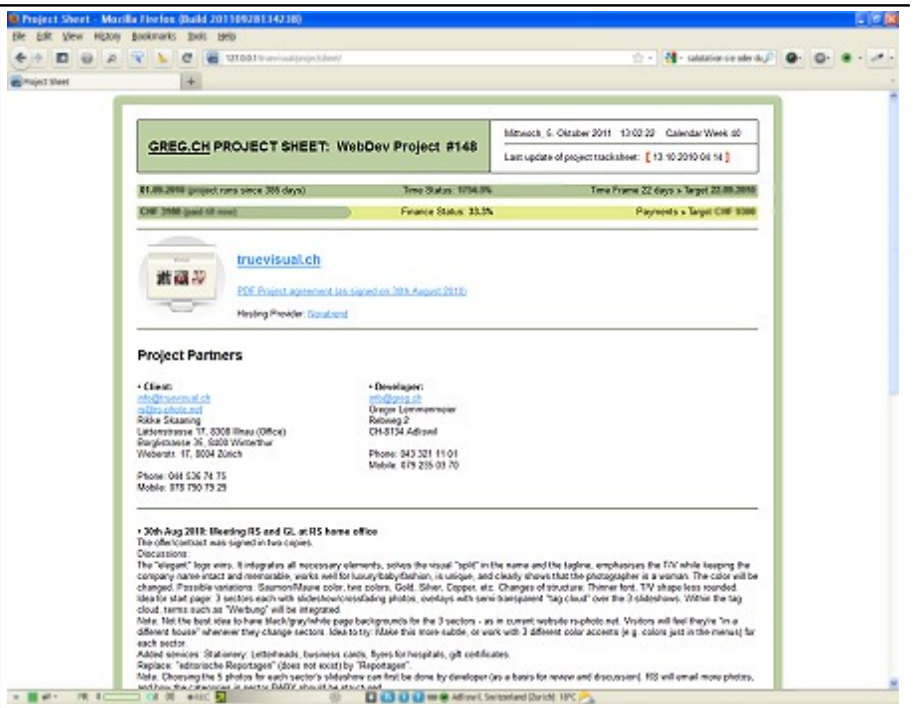
The client wanted to also have the .com domain – **www.truevisual.com** – in addition to www.truevisual.ch. But someone else already owned it. And shockingly, it was the notorious domain trader "*Navigation Catalyst Systems, Inc.*" (use Google to read about their illegal and aggressive methods – or about their legal disputes). Indeed, this was a tough nut to crack. I used my strategic skills and carefully negotiated with them on a price. After going trough all the red tape, I finally bought the domain, which I then transferred to the client as a gift.

Project Documentation

It's important – but usually not done by most web developers – that websites are **clearly documented for the client.**

I documented this site in a clear way:

- Online prototype (client "follows live")
- PW-protected **Project Tracksheet**
- Get an email when client accesses it
- **Autom. charts** (time %, and paid %)
- Give client all she needs for a review
- Notes of all new client requirements
- Notes of all agreed project changes
- **Chronological structure**, with dates
- Screenshots of new layout solutions
- Include all important **contact data**
- Include infos on **webhosting account**
- Include **infos, tips, and give reasons**



Client Satisfaction

The written testimonial that I received from the client (the Danish professional photographer) says:

"In short: fantastic job - I most appreciate it!! More exactly: Greg is the man for professional web-solutions! With his extensive knowledge and talent he manages, even in the most complex jobs, to present high up-to-date quality and solutions!"

This case study was written by
Greg Lemmenmeier (GREG.CH)
Self-employed Web Developer
Client project # 148