



Fueling Durham's economy through visitor-related economic development

SPECIAL EDITION

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[FORWARD TO A FRIEND](#)

[Print This Issue](#)

IN THIS ISSUE:

[DCVB Launches Improved Website for Visitors](#)

[New Features Enhance www.durham-nc.com](#)

[New Look Delivers on Destination Brand](#)

[It's a Hit: Website Logs 54 Million Requests](#)

[The Net's Not Just for Hippies Anymore](#)

## [DCVB Launches Improved Website for Visitors](#)


Stakeholders Invited to Test Drive the Community's Official Destination Marketing Tool...

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## [New Features Enhance www.durham-nc.com](#)

 Redesign Makes the Website Easier to Navigate, More Appealing for Visitors...

Perhaps most striking are the visual changes, which capture the essence of Durham as well as any descriptive text...

## [New Look Delivers on Destination Brand](#)

 Vintage Brick Design Conveys Durham as Genuine, Textured, and Authentic...

It isn't uncommon for a destination marketing organization, like DCVB, to pioneer a community's first brand...



[Archives](#)  
click here

[How to Use This Newsletter](#)

## It's a Hit: Website Logs 54 Million Requests



Nearly 10 Years of Web Marketing Measured in Hits, Awards, and Accolades...

*Most recently, the Economic Development Institute at Georgia Tech selected DCVB as a case study in Web marketing...*

## The Net's Not Just for Hippies Anymore



Durham CVB Continues to Pioneer Internet Technology for Visitors...

*The 2004 website redesign puts DCVB soundly in the middle of an information architecture age...*

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## DCVB Launches Improved Website for Visitors

*Stakeholders Invited to Test Drive the Community's Official Destination Marketing Tool*

Today the Durham Convention & Visitors Bureau announces the launch of its enhanced and improved website at [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com). The [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com) homepage is Durham's official site for visitors (including potential newcomers), meeting and event planners, film location scouts, and travel writers.

Durhamites also are frequent users of the site, for many of the reasons listed at right. Residents, visitor-sector partners, and other community stakeholders are invited to test drive the redesigned site, which contains the same depth of coverage that users have come to expect from DCVB but in a freshened format.

The redesigned site is DCVB's most user-friendly yet, with an [assortment of navigation options](#) that keep the visitor, event planner, travel writer, researcher, and resident foremost in mind.

Layers of detailed Durham info are tied together with Durham's "[genuine, textured, authentic](#)" brand including an historic brick motif plucked from Downtown architecture.

With its freshened site, DCVB remains committed to providing information on "everything Durham" and to organizing this information in layers of ever-increasing detail according to user need/interest.

Top-level menus, buttons, hyperlinks and their accompanying text provide a glimpse of what lies deeper on each page, mirroring the fluidity of the mind and keeping the user from hunting-and-clicking unnecessarily.

The site still uses PHP scripting language, first introduced on [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com) in 2002. This scripting language allows the website to generate new results pages on-the-fly by accessing DCVB's internal databases.

When something about the community or one of its 2,000 visitor-related organizations changes, new info is quickly added to DCVB's internal databases and will be reflected in the Bureau's website listings within hours.

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to Submit  
Feedback**

**These are just 10 of the many ways that Durham residents and workers can make use of [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com):**

Forward a hyperlink to visiting friends, relatives, or business associates and to those relocating.

Search the Community Calendar to clear dates for upcoming events and to avoid conflicts.

Add a link to own site, making it convenient for customers to make travel arrangements.

Download Durham screensavers to enhance community pride and promote awareness.

Check the site for family outing ideas; be a visitor in one's own community.

Send Durham e-postcards as

DCVB's website also serves as a popular portal to many other Durham sites and to data culled from a variety of Durham sources. For example, the official [Durham Community Calendar](#) contains over 2,000 events, continuously updated by event organizers and fully searchable by Durham visitors and residents.

DCVB's [Research & Statistics](#) page and [Other Durham Websites](#) page are additional examples of portals.

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[HOME](#)

special occasion greetings to family and friends.

Use the site's built-in mapping features/driving directions to locate Durham businesses.

Consult the site's Research & Statistics to update business and marketing plans.

Track Accolades and What Others Are Saying for selling points to attract new customers/employees.

Chat live with DCVB sales staff to ask questions about holding a meeting/event in Durham.

May 28, 2004

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## New Features Enhance www.durham-nc.com

*Redesign Makes the Website Easier to Navigate, More Appealing for Visitors*

The newly improved DCVB website builds upon the Bureau's tradition of comprehensive coverage for "everything Durham" by incorporating a wealth of new features and functions. These changes affect not only the site's look but also its structure and performance.

Perhaps most striking are the visual changes, which capture the essence of Durham as well as any descriptive text.

The enhanced site embraces a more colorful and dynamic design with bright photos, new buttons, and a historic brick motif from Downtown architecture that represents Durham's "[genuine, textured, authentic](#)" character.

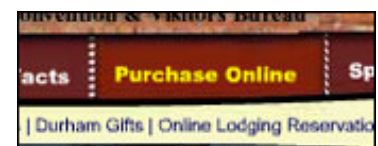
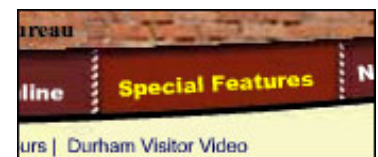
In addition, many images throughout the site change automatically each time a user visits, and DCVB staff can rotate other images seasonally to keep the overall look fresh.

Other improvements to the site's design, structure, and performance are:

- A [top-level navigation menu](#) built with Flash technology. The menu loads faster and offers more options according to users' needs/intentions.
- Four, customizable blocks on the [homepage](#) that draw attention to Signature Annual Events, seasonal visitor features, and other timely messages. These will be updated and replaced regularly.
- A new menu category, [Special Features](#), which encapsulates the site's most unique offerings—Durham's blog, electronic postcards, and more.
- A more appealing [Things to See & Do page](#). This page not only allows for simpler navigation to detailed information but also gives a graphical preview of Durham's diverse visitor features.
- A new section, [Purchase Online](#), which gives easy access to several advanced features on the site, including Getaway Packages, Online Travel Reservations, and Durham Gifts—all sold through the Web.



*DCVB's newly redesigned website features many new elements, including pop-up slide shows in several sections.*



Pop-up slide shows in the [Visitor Information](#), [Group Planners](#), and Newcomer Information sections.

- A [webpage highlighting 360° tours](#) presented by DCVB and its partners. These and other tours are also linked individually on listings pages.
- A new menu category, [News Media](#), which gathers DCVB's many news-related resources into one portal. A Media Kit request form and Story Ideas page round out the offerings here.

All of former site's features are still available, and many are easier to find! Customizable searches of Things to See & Do, Places to Stay, Places to Eat, and the Durham Community Calendar remain popular tools with users of [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com), and they are now accessible as Quick Links on every website page.

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May 28, 2004

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## New Look Delivers on Destination Brand

*Vintage Brick Design Conveys Durham as Genuine, Textured, and Authentic*

The [brand for a community](#) as a “place” is much more than a slogan, tagline, logo, or ad. A good community brand is not just a label but a “promise” to visitors, newcomers, relocating businesses, and most of all, residents. The brand must convey the identity of the community as compared to other communities.

A community’s brand also must be the sum total of a customer’s perceptions and encounters. The brand that DCVB has used for Durham for many years is “[Durham: Genuine, Textured, Authentic.](#)”

A new look to convey this brand, featuring vintage brick and a stamp with these words, first appeared on [DCVB's Annual Progress Report](#), then on the *Official Durham Visitors Guide*. Now, it is carried on each page of the updated [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com).

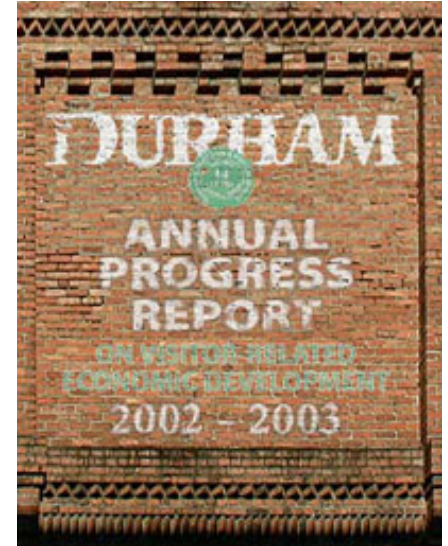
It isn’t uncommon for the visitor destination marketing organization in a community (in Durham’s case, DCVB) to pioneer a community’s first brand, followed by other economic development and investment development entities.

Currently though, [there are other brands](#) in Durham including “Bull City,” “City of Medicine, USA,” “A County with MERIT,” and “Good Things Are Happening in Durham.”

Recently, the 10-organization [Durham Public Information and Communications Council](#) took on the task of collectively re-evaluating existing Durham brands and their respective marketing plans to determine if it is possible to have just one overarching brand for the community.

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May 28, 2004

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## It's a Hit: Website Logs 54 Million Requests

*Nearly 10 Years of Web Marketing Measured in Hits, Awards, and Accolades*

DCVB has been marketing Durham on the Internet for almost 10 years, since [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com) was first developed in 1995. During that time, the website's user base has grown exponentially, and methods for measuring the site's effectiveness also have come a long way.

In the earliest days, the official website for Durham visitors garnered close to 35,000 user sessions each year. Now nine years later, the site is generating three-quarters of a million user sessions annually—and almost twice as many hits (individual page requests) each week as it did the entire first year.

Present-day tracking software measures everything from number of user sessions to users' average session length to users' country of origin. The charts at right provide a glimpse of several DCVB website performance indicators.

Another way to evaluate a website is by tracking the accolades it receives. The [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com) site has received [numerous awards in recent years](#), including the 2001 Gold [Destination Marketing Achievement Award](#) from the North Carolina Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), the Web Marketing Association's 2002 WebAward Competition Standard of Excellence, and the 2002 eMarketing Association Site of the Year Award—one of only six given worldwide.

Most recently, the Economic Development Institute at Georgia Tech selected DCVB as a [case study in Web marketing](#) for its forthcoming book on best practices in tourism and destination management. DCVB was the only CVB in North Carolina and one of only three in the US to be chosen for inclusion in the book.

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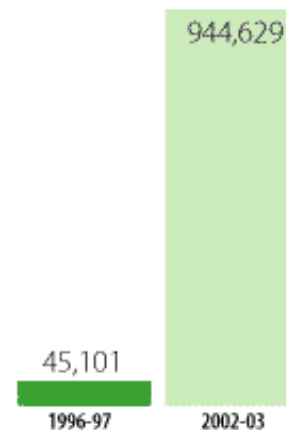
### Understanding hits vs. user sessions:

If a user views 10 webpages in succession on [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com), tracking software counts one user session but 10 hits.

**Number of Hits**  
*www.durham-nc.com*



**Number of User Sessions**  
*www.durham-nc.com*



## Top Countries of Origin

2003-2004

*www.durham-nc.com*

United States

Canada

United Kingdom

Japan

Germany

Australia

Netherlands

Italy

France

Mexico

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## The Net's Not Just for Hippies Anymore

### *Durham CVB Continues to Pioneer Internet Technology for Visitors*

The Nineties—a decade of Internet freedom of expression and free-flowing experimentation—are over. According to Internet observers, first-generation webmasters—mostly techies, graphic designers, hippies of the Internet age—are growing up, and along with them, the World Wide Web is also maturing.

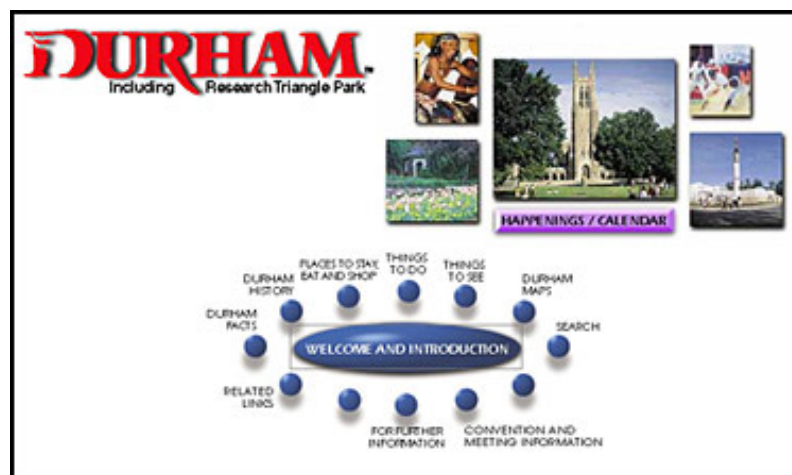
The next stage of website development will be led by writers and editors, obsessed with organization, information architecture, and effective communication. DCVB is continuing to lead the way, enhancing its Internet communications to remain competitive and attractive to visitors in the online market.

Since its inception in 1989, the Durham Convention & Visitors Bureau has been committed to pioneering, adopting, and adapting new and improved technology as a competitive advantage in its mission of attracting visitors. The most visible example of this technology and one of the greatest direct benefits to Durham visitors is the Bureau's website, [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com).

Across the globe, the shift from publishing on paper to publishing on the Web was no less than revolutionary. The reduced cost and heightened efficiency of the Internet lowered barriers to entering almost any market, effectively leveling the playing field for lesser-known destinations and for small businesses.

In particular, the paradigm shift had a phenomenal effect on destination marketing, opening up new distribution systems and empowering travelers with more information.

Like many others' first ventures online, DCVB's first website (1995) was successful in presenting an abundance of Durham visitor info, but most of that information was static, requiring continuous, manual updating and time-consuming maintenance—like a printed brochure.



In 1998, the Bureau launched a new site—this time, a very comprehensive combination of static pages and automatically updatable elements—all the while working toward a fully database-driven site, with ever-accurate and up-to-the-minute information for Durham

visitors.



In 2002, DCVB converted [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com) to a more effective database-driven platform. Henceforth, the site would use a scripting language to generate new webpages on-the-fly by accessing DCVB's internal databases.



This month, the Bureau launched an [enhanced website](#), retaining the scripting features of the former and freshening the overall design. While almost every page of listings remains database-driven, even those that aren't are now simpler to update by DCVB staff. The improvements in design will allow DCVB writers and editors to update 90% of the site's data, without involving computer techs or external vendors.

DCVB joins the many businesses and organizations that have moved beyond the "online brochure" stage of website design (where sites were graphically intense reproductions of existing, static-text brochures).

The 2004 website redesign puts DCVB soundly in the middle of an information architecture age (where sites retain their detailed content but are organized according to the fluidity of the mind and of the Web medium itself).

Always committed to improvement, the Bureau will continue to make adjustments and

implement new features on [www.durham-nc.com](http://www.durham-nc.com) in the coming months.

(Portions adapted from "[The Hippie Days Are Gone](#)" by [Gerry McGovern](#))

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