



TENTH ANNIVERSARY: RiverBender.com marks decade in online media business on Halloween

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - As **RiverBender.com's** float passed through downtown Alton at the annual Halloween Parade on Saturday night, it was a celebration of sorts as its company marks its 10th anniversary on that date.

RiverBender.com opened for business on **Oct. 31, 2005**, on Halloween.

It is a time for RiverBender.com to look back at numerous accomplishments to date and plan for what is ahead in the digital media and marketing industry.



RiverBender.com was an innovation not heard of before in the region a decade ago when **owners John and Dawn Hentrich** began what has become quite a journey.

“We have been in business for 10 years as **Riverbender.com** and our goal has always been to build a bigger, better, stronger community,” John Hentrich said. “We are very proud of the awards we've won for community service and economic impact. It brings great joy to be in a position where we can give back to the community especially with the work we have done through the community center.”

Their investment in this community could not have been possible without their previous Internet success in Chicago. Prior to starting Riverbender.com, John and Dawn created a website called World Wide Wheels back in 1995 that changed the way people shopped for cars. In six short years that business grew to more than 25 employees who managed a database of over 65,000 cars for sale from nearly 400 Chicagoland dealers. They sold their business to AutoTrader.com and they moved back to Alton to raise their three children.

“The core of our business is the RiverBender.com website with over 50,000 pages of local content. We have the best in news, sports, entertainment, autos, real estate, classifieds, community events, video, and everything else imaginable. We set out to be the #1 source for everything local and I think we are getting the job done.” Hentrich admits its been a little bigger job than he originally anticipated but he says he feels great about his place in the market at this stage of the business.

A little more than a year ago, RiverBender.com started an affiliate site called **EdGlenToday.com** - to expand its coverage to the **Edwardsville/Glen Carbon** area, and it continues to gain viewership and advertising in that market. (<http://www.EdGlenToday.com>)



Dawn added that a large percentage of people already get all of their information through digital media sources, and the trend will continue to grow rapidly into the foreseeable future.

“Digital is absolutely where it is at,” she said. “The key for us now is staying one step ahead of everyone else. That includes taking care of the business owners, our website visitors, and our wonderful staff.”

Dawn Hentrich has always been the one that keeps track of the overall finances for all of their companies. She handles the accounting, payroll, insurance, and taxes, and said she enjoys that side of the business.

When asked what he likes most about his job John replied with "I really love the sense of accomplishment and the fact that so many people enjoy and benefit from the work we do. People on the streets commend us all the time on how much they love what we are doing. That's what keeps me going. I'm very proud of the team and of what we have accomplished." Riverbender.com has over over 400 active customers. They have built and continue to maintained websites for area schools, municipalities, business associations, radio stations across the country, and a variety of local businesses.



In an effort to make even more of a positive impact on our community, John and Dawn started the **Riverbender.com Community Center** (<http://www.riverbender.com/communitycenter>) approximately 6 years ago and it has served thousands of teens and families over the years. The center is a separate 501c3 non-profit organization. John is the volunteer executive director while Dawn handles all the accounting and numerous other responsibilities.



In lockstep with their commitment to serving the community and being the technology leader, about a year and a half ago, John decided to expand the operations of Riverbender again. In June of 2014 they opened the **Riverbender.com Tech Center** (<http://www.RBTechCenter.com>). The computer store is located on the first floor of the Riverbender.com building and it offers all types of computer and laptop repairs, smart phone and tablet screen repair, and on-site network management services. They also offer video surveillance and just about anything else when it comes to technology.

The latest innovation from Riverbender.com is called **Shop Local**. This is a new section on Riverbender.com that just launched on October 15th. The project further shows the ongoing commitment to small business in our community. Owner John Hentrich says "I'm both proud and excited that we are at a point where can offer this great service to

local businesses at no charge. I want to help the small business owner succeed online and this program enables them to create compelling offers and calls to action that will



drive customers in their door."

Shop Local features coupons, special offers, and discount gift certificates and is deemed the place where you will find the best deals in the RiverBend. Since his mission closely mirrors that of the RiverBend Growth Association, Hentrich reached out to them to partner with this program. The RBGA will promote the service to their members as well as any new companies that enter the RiverBend market area.

With all that has been accomplished over the last 10 years, it is hard to say what the next 10 will bring. If history repeats itself it's going to include more exciting innovations, more technology, and an even more giving back to the community!