

It's been one year. Can you believe it? TheClevelandFan.com celebrates our first birthday today, and what a fun year it's been for us here at the site. In honor of reaching our first milestone, I put together a column that kind of explains how things all came together, and how we got where we are, giving thanks to all the people that helped contribute to our success. Thank you all so much for visiting this website each day, and trust me when I tell you that the best is yet to come from us here at The Blurbs.



Well, we're one.

One year old that is. It was on this date last year (February 1, 2006) when this website officially went live. And now, 1,292 columns later, TheClevelandFan.com reaches it's first milestone.

The concept of this website is one I really started thinking about a couple of years ago. As a lifelong Clevelander, and longtime denizen of the Internet, it always bothered me that there were no good Cleveland sports websites out in cyberspace. There were several excellent websites that catered specifically to one of the teams we now follow, but none that covered the Cleveland sports scene as a whole. There was Cleveland.com, but that website was (is) a mess, and all they offered up were the online versions of their print columns from The Plain Dealer ... and little more.

I really felt there was a market for this, especially seeing as how more and more people were abandoning their newspaper subscriptions to go to the Internet for their sports news on the teams they love. Additionally, I really felt that I had the potential to put together a solid roster of incredibly talented writers for this endeavor. Some were friends, some were business acquaintances, some were guys that I'd written with on other websites, some were bloggers, and some were people that I had been talking sports with for years on various message boards like the ones we host on this site. All were brilliant wordsmiths, who lived and died with these teams. Guys that deserved a bigger audience of readers. Guys that I'd rather read than most of the paid journalists in this town. Guys that have lived here their whole lives, and didn't grow up fans of other teams before being imported from other cities like Bill Livingston and Bud Shaw were.

This was during the spring of 2005. My wife was pregnant, and I had been warned what children did to a man's social life. I needed a project, a hobby, something to help consume me as I adjusted to a life that consisted of more time at the home front with the family, and less galavanting around town with my unmarried buddies. And I was downright terrified that if I

waited any longer, that someone else would take this idea and run with it.

There was one problem though. I had no clue how to create, start, or maintain a website ... and really had little to no knowledge of anything related to web design or e-business. I've always been a guy that has been big on self-educating myself. So I read. Book after book about web design and the inner workings of the Internet. I made notes. I started making rough drafts of business plans and blueprints.

My son was born early in the morning of July 11th, 2005. It was that night, from my wife's hospital room, that I sketched out the final blueprint for this endeavor onto the pages of a legal pad.

In the months to follow, that blueprint was transferred onto an Excel spreadsheet. I eventually started messing around, trying to design some web pages. My skills were still a little rough around the edges. And I had a newborn, a wife, and a full time day job that didn't leave me with the free time I truly needed to devote to this project. I needed a partner.

This led me to begin a search for a web designer that could help me put this thing together. My initial Googles led me to national firms, who wanted an arm, a leg, testicle, and pinky finger for their services. My budget was seriously limited. It basically consisted of a couple hundred bucks a month that I could spend without the wife noticing. So I started surfing the net for local web designers. I needed someone that could sympathize with what I was trying to do, someone that believed in my vision. Someone local, up and coming, and looking for work.

After a couple days of scouring the net for every local Tom, Dick, and Harry that could be a potential fit, I sent out my business plan and spreadsheet blueprint via a blind carbon copy e-mail to about 30 or 40 northeast Ohio web designers one Saturday morning. About thirty minutes after hitting "send", the phone rang. It was Steve DiFranco from [OhioConnect.net](#). He mentioned that he'd been designing websites for three or four years, and had just recently gone full time with his business. He was a lifelong Clevelander and a rabid Cleveland sports fan. He told me his dream was to build sports websites, and that he genuinely believed in my idea. We met for lunch a couple days later, and have been friends and partners ever since.

Steve built me this website for a fraction of what others wanted, and I could not have done this without him. He's a great guy, and is frighteningly efficient, quick, and affordable. If anyone out there (or anyone you know) ever needs a website built, I strongly recommend [Steve's company](#), and that's no paid or coerced advertisement. This is me assuring you that you are flushing money down the toilet if you go anywhere else, and personally testifying as to his top notch quality of work.

Working hand in hand with Steve, the website was basically created in late 2005, but I wanted to be sure all my bases were covered before unleashing this on the free world. I organized and informed all the guys involved, and we picked February 1, 2006 as the "go live" date. Our first order of business was to analyze the trade that saw the Indians deal Coco Crisp, Josh

Bard, and David Riske to the Red Sox for Andy Marte, Kelly Shoppach, and Guillermo Mota ... which went down literally hours before we went live.

When I started this thing, I promised myself that this was a hobby for life, that I would commit fully to it, and that I would spend at least a small part of every single day of my life improving, or thinking of how to improve the website. And we've been very lucky to be able to do that. The progress that we've made in the layout, the look, the features, the roster of writers, and overall quality of content has been nothing short of amazing. We've done in one year what I thought it would take me three or four years to do.

In our early stages, we were lucky to get a couple hundred visitors on any given day. Even after the Cavaliers playoff run that saw traffic skyrocket as a result, we were still only seeing about 5,000 to 6,000 "unique visitors" hit the website each month. In January of 2007, we saw just under 20,000 "unique visitors" frequent the site. This has happened without spending a single penny on advertising.

Given the talent I have been lucky enough to assemble, and the great start we've gotten off to, it's really exciting to me to think what we could potentially accomplish in, say, five years time. I vow to keep my nose to the grindstone, to continue to improve the product and the quality of our journalism. I vow to never make any of our visitors pay to read our columns, or make them pay for anything for that matter. It's my hope that our readers will continue to support our sponsors, which help support our site, but I'll never force open anyones wallets. We're getting involved with some exciting and intriguing partners, and finally have a small monthly budget which can be put back into the site and it's contributors.

This is really alot of fun for me. I live and die with the four teams we cover here on the website. I love writing and reading about them, and watching the games ... both live and from the comfort of my own home. I love my new hobby - owning, operating, and contributing to this project. And I long for the day that we as Clevelanders can finally experience the feeling of a professional sports title, together, here on this website.

Before I depart, I have to hand out some thanks. First and foremost to those of you reading this. Those of you that spend parts of your days frequenting this website, opining on the message boards, and e-mailing our writers. I have to say thanks again to Steve DiFranco, for all the reasons mentioned above. Many thanks to Tony Lastoria, Steve Buffum, Cris Sykes, Mike Furlan, and Mitch Cyrus ... all of whom have been with me and believed in me from day one despite me not being able to pay them anything for their time for all of 2006. Thanks to John Hnat, Jeff Rickel, Erik Cassano, Todd Dery, Gary Benz, Chris Weizer, Scott Swerbinsky, Al Canitia, Jarad Regano, Jim Barrett, and Hiko - all of whom have joined the team and made us stronger for it. And thanks to my wife Hallie, who has put up (begrudgingly at times) with me spending many, many nights working on the site after putting our son Nicholas (now 18 months) to bed.

It's been a fun first year, but the best is yet to come.

Thank you, and may God bless the Browns, Buckeyes, Cavaliers, and Indians.