CASE STUDY

Building a marketplace to take the client's business to the new level

ONLINE COOKING COURSES
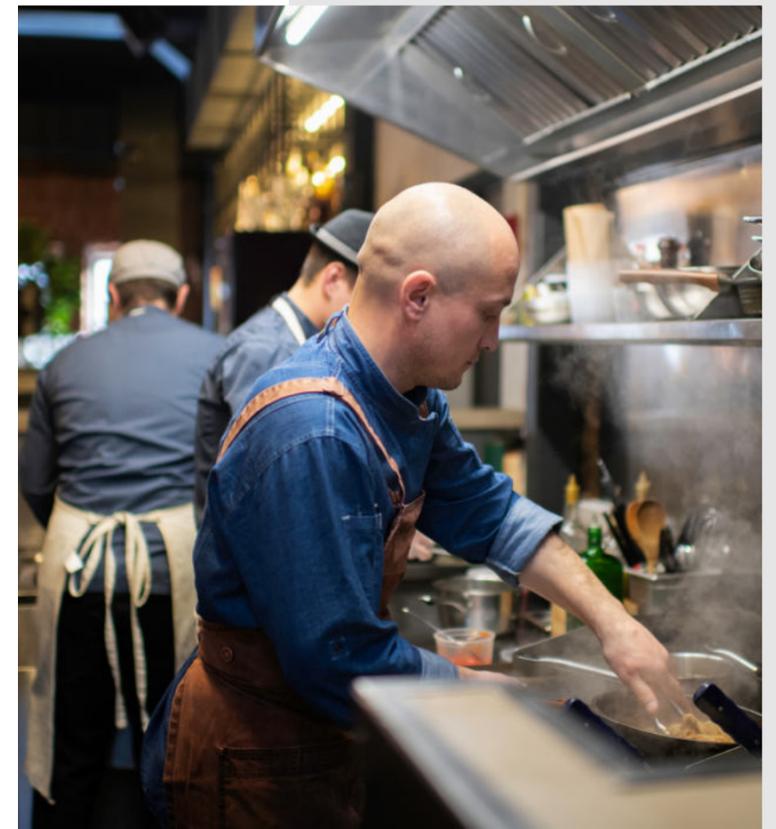
About Client

A chain of restaurants in major French cities that organizes **online cooking courses** in different cuisines of the world. Events and workshops can be held not only by the chefs who work for our client directly but also by anyone who wishes to hold such events.

Client in figures

15 **years**

At the market

12k+

Facebook followers

750+

Reviews at TripAdvisor

100+

Chefs holding cooking events around the world

Challenges

The client's been building and developing their business for quite some time, and at some point, hits the ceiling of capacity. It becomes clear that it's time to expand and move forward to take the company to a new level.

As for the existing client's business, it has four restaurants, where the chefs hold cooking events – courses, masterclasses and workshops. When the client exhausts their resources and feels the demand for participation in events, they start thinking about allowing other users to hold such cooking events after signing up with the website, which would increase business opportunities and attract new audiences that eventually requires an upgrade of the existing website.

After the first meeting with the client and the general discussion of their business, we analyze the capabilities of the current website platform and conclude that it's worth offering the client to change it. The current platform is Magento 1, which was developed way back in 2014. By the time of the request, Magento 1 is outdated enough to introduce the new functionality the client expects.

Also, Magento has plans to stop supporting the platform of version 1.9 in a year, which means that soon it would require moving to a new platform anyway, and then the client would have to pay again for the introduction of the additional customizations.

That's why we offer the client to migrate from Magento 1 to Magento 2 latest version at that moment and develop customizations the client expects there. In other words, the client wouldn't have to pay twice for the same work.
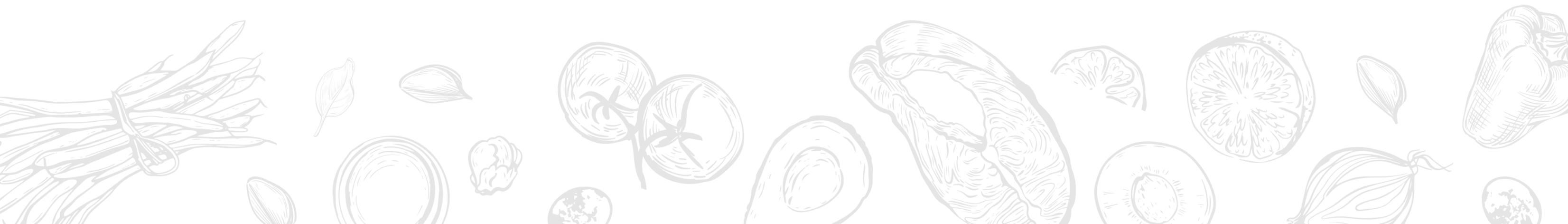
Solutions
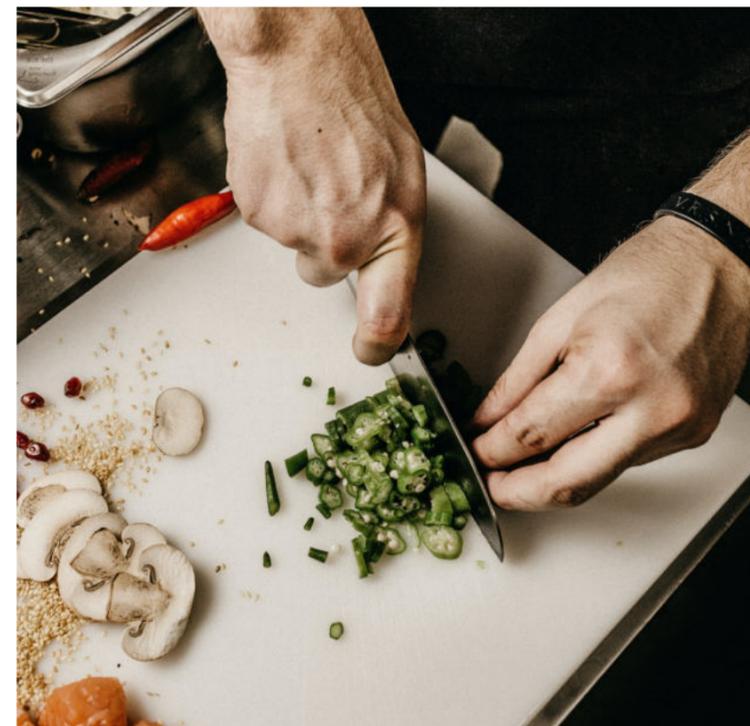
1.1 Discovery Stage

We start the project by discovering the client's business in more detail to better understand the nature of what they do so that our team can suggest proper implementation options. We gather information about the industry, such as their competitive environment, industry trends, and their existing marketing and SEO activities. We also pay attention to the study of the target audience to learn their intentions, pain points, drivers and build the customer journey on the website. As a whole, it helps us to develop the initial vision of the project.

After doing the research and taking into account the client's requirements, we understand that we need to introduce an additional role for users that is able to hold events, which we call New Chefs. They are a copy of the existing website feature, Old Chefs, that is managed by the current admin. They can describe their own Restaurants and add different Courses and Masterclasses (events) as well.

To give a better option for Participants to register for Courses and Masterclasses, we implement an entity of Session, which is a sort of a lesson within an event. It enables better organizing the scheduling process and picking the Chef, location, time and date that fit them the most.

The project roles interact through commercial dealings, where Chefs hold courses, and Participants pay for those, which means that we land on a business model that is a sort of a marketplace.It turns out that, on the one hand, we have an interaction between the Old Chefs from the client's restaurants, who are the representatives of their business, and the participants of the events (consumers). In other words, there's a **business-to-consumer (B2C)**[1] collaboration.

On the other hand, there is another chain of interactions the client's website allows New Chefs from other restaurants holding their own events, which introduces a **business-to-business (B2B)**[2] element.

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[1] **Business-to-consumer (B2C)** refers to the process of selling products and services directly between a business and consumers who are the end-users of its products or services. B2C marketplace is an online platform where entrepreneurs and their customers interact with each other. Various vendors from different spatial locations get associated with offering their products for sale, where admin will earn commission on the products sold.

[2] **Business-to-business (B2B)** is a form of transaction between businesses, such as one involving a manufacturer and wholesaler, or a wholesaler and a retailer. Business to business refers to business that is conducted between companies, rather than between a company and individual consumers. B2B marketplace is a website where brands sell their products and services (in bulk) to other businesses.

The New Chefs from other restaurants, in their turn, interact with consumers, which adds another **business- to-consumer (B2C)** section.

As a result, the **business-to-business (B2B)** and **business-to-consumer (B2C)** pieces are organized into a **B2B2C3** part of the marketplace.

All the information from the previous steps — market analysis, target audience, and our initial vision of the project — allows us to build a **sitemap**[4] and a high-level features list, which are necessary to understand the high-level scope of the project and have the initial estimate that gives the client information on the project major expectations: budget and time-line at the early stage. Based on the initial SEO audit, we understand which pages of the website will be destination ones and therefore require SEO support. This factor also provides us with the correct page architecture laying for further working with it.

1.2 Planning Stage

After getting the client onboard on the high-level scope, budget, and timeline, we move forward to the planning phase by showing the client a more specific and detailed vision of the project. Based on the high-level features list and the sitemap, we make prototypes of the templates to create a basic appearance of the website with the main blocks on the pages. It allows the client to see how the website is going to look to keep up with the competitive market conditions and make adjustments if necessary.

An average ecommerce project contains the following templates — homepage, category page, product details page, which are usually unique, and several other important sections of the ecommerce lifecycle, which usually reuse the out-of-the box Magento functionality — shopping cart, checkout, personal account, etc. Magento has the functionality for these sections powerful enough, so whenever it makes sense to reuse the existing force, we recommend doing so.

[3] **Business-to-business-to-consumer (B2B2C)** is an e-commerce model that combines business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) for a complete product or service transaction. B2B2C is a collaboration process that, in theory, creates mutually beneficial service and product delivery channels.

[4] **Sitemap** is a visual diagram of the hierarchy of pages within a website. Typically, sitemapping is one of the first tasks to be completed in any web design and development project.

The ideas behind this project are quite interesting, which require quite a lot of customizations of Magento capabilities. Therefore, we end up with prototyping the following templates:

- Homepage

- List of Restaurants page with a map search

- List of Chefs page and their features

- Chef account with various sections for managing their Restaurant, Courses and Sessions

- Participant account with additional sections for working with Courses/ Masterclasses/Sessions, package offers, and the loyalty program

- Custom pages for categories with unique filtering capabilities

- Registration pages for two roles — New Chef and Participant

- Product details pages for different types of Courses, Masterclasses and Events

- Custom shopping cart page to handle custom product types, gift cards, and custom website currency — hour packages

- Checkout page to process the new custom entities

When we have a clear understanding of how the website pages look and what information they contain, we start working on the project specification document. The project specification document includes the prototypes and the description of all the blocks there, the information on browsers and devices support and acceptance criteria to set the expectations for the client, main development force and quality assurance people. After that, we show the intermediate results to the client and make improvements, in case it makes sense.
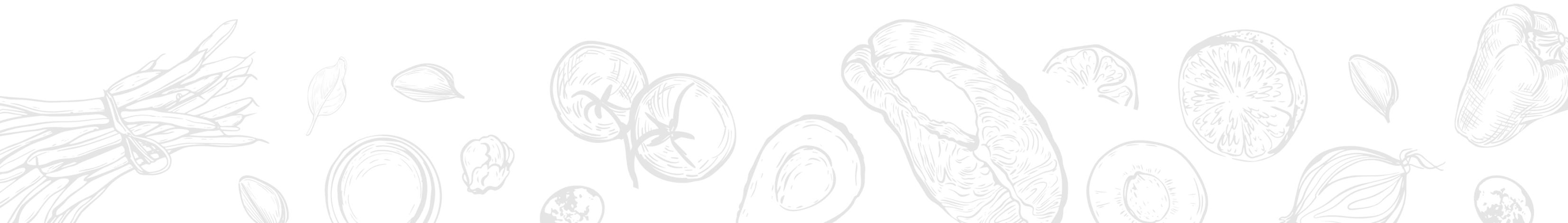
1.3 Design Stage

The next step is starting working on designs by filling the prototypes with graphics, color and content, which turns the prototypes into a beautiful user-friendly website design.

The result of our work at the planning and design stages is not only a set of artifacts but also a confirmation of expectations for the three global aspects of the project — scope, budget and timeline. It means that we're ready to head for the development of the project.

After we receive a go-ahead for further working from the client, we start the project implementation stage, and one of the most important things is to have a team with the necessary seniority level and relevant experience.
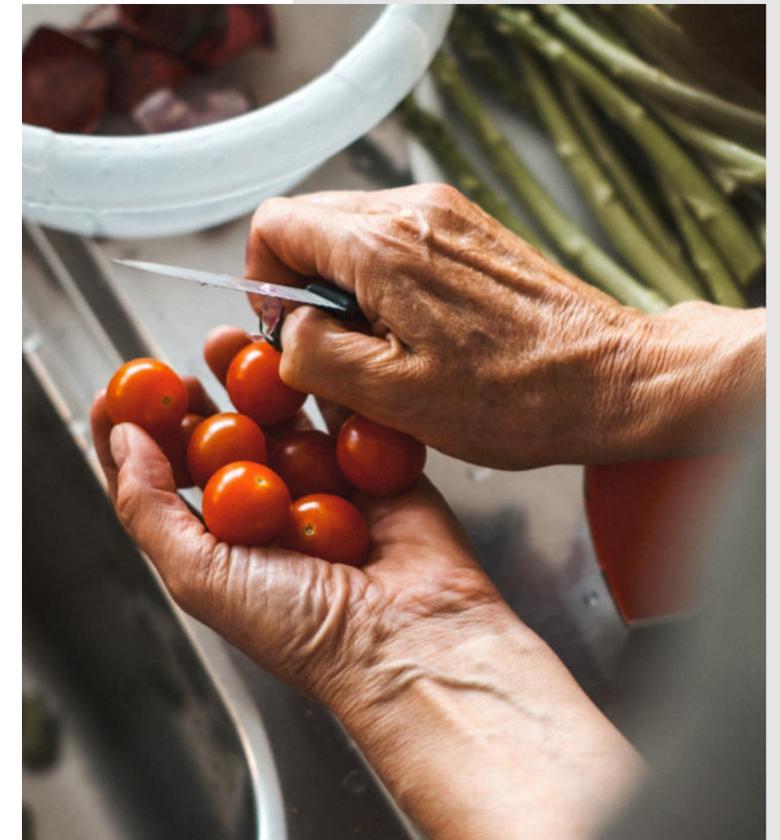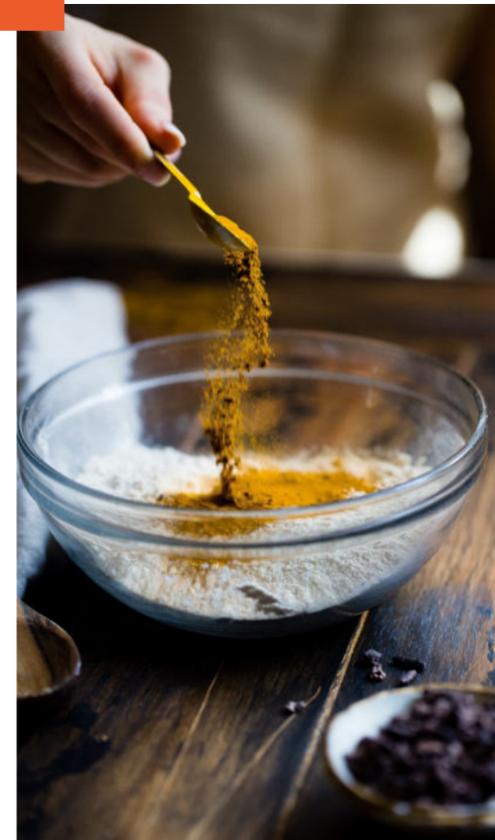
Development
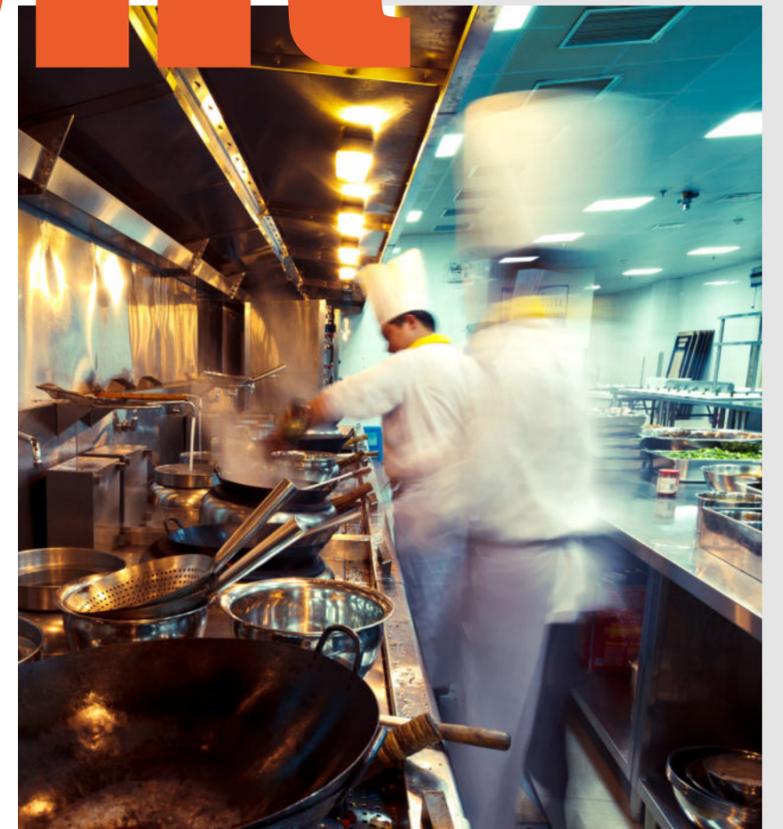
2.1 Implementation Stage

This project has the following development team: a Project Manager, 3 Back-End, 2 Front-End Developers, and a QA Engineer. It's worth mentioning that when we have more than one team member of a particular project role (e.g. a Back-End Developer), one of them is always responsible for their entire direction. We call such people **Technical Leads**[5], and in this case, there are two Technical Leads for the Back-End and Front-End parts respectively.

Usually, the development process is carried out iteratively. We take a particular part of the project, work it out by selecting a certain number of designs and respective features from the specification doc, create intermediate acceptance criteria, and then push those into development. It allows us to get early feedback and boost a specific part of the project if there's a demand.

Our paradigm is starting the work with the most complex and high-risk features of the project to minimize at the very early stages possible miscommunications or falling short of expectations. In such a way, we're working on the very first iteration, which includes creating and optimizing the role of New Chef, the entity of Course, and the category page, which are the foundation of the website general custom logic.

Courses are the basis for different types of events (Masterclasses, Workshops, etc.), New Chefs and related functionality are the base for interactions of all user types at the website, and the category page is essential for all the list view pages. The work is carried out in the same way until the general project scope approval. Then we move on to the final phase of the **data migration**[6] and content population.

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[5] **Technical Lead** is someone who provides guidance, instruction, direction and leadership to a group of individuals (the team) for the purpose of achieving a key result or group of aligned results.

[6] **Data migration** is a process that a website undergoes in order to change its setup or technology. It's a complex and challenging process, which implies serious changes, usually regarding the website's platform, structure, content, location or design.

2.2 Pre-Launch Stage

When the website is ready, we get a signoff from the client and go to the launch preparation, which includes the pre-launch process that usually lasts a week. It covers going through the QA relaunch checklist to verify that the website complies with our standards for SEO, performance, security, and other requirements.

2.3 Launch Stage

Then the launch stage follows, which introduces launching a project in a live environment with switching DNS, configuring the Magento application and cinnecting all the essential third-party services.

2.4 Post-Launch Stage

The post-launch phase takes place and consists of another QA checklist to check the correct launch, enabling all the necessary SEO and marketing tools, which were specified in the project scope. It ensures reliable protection, high search engines visility and website performance in the future.
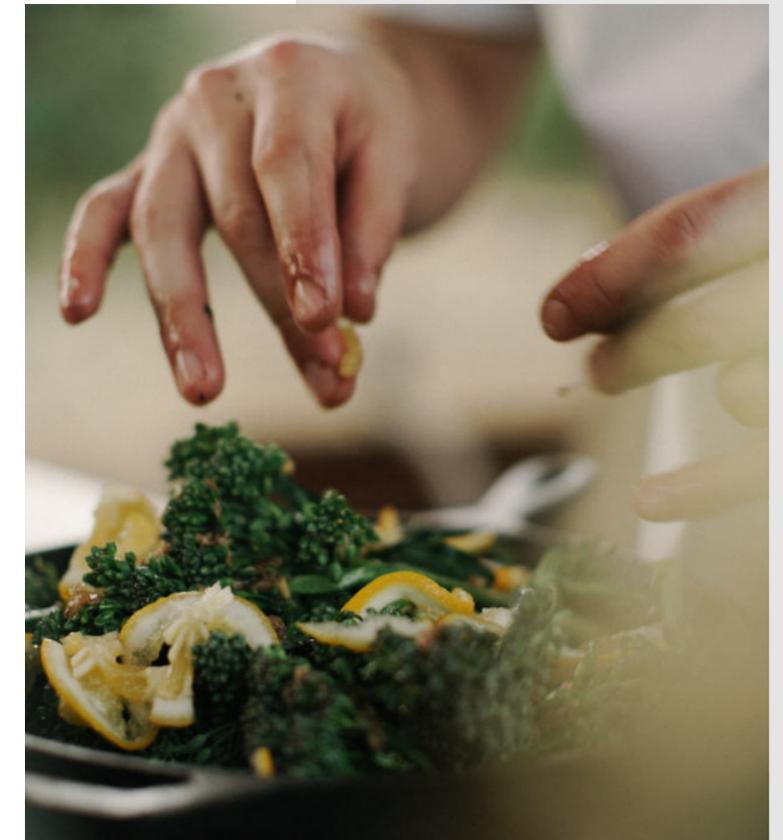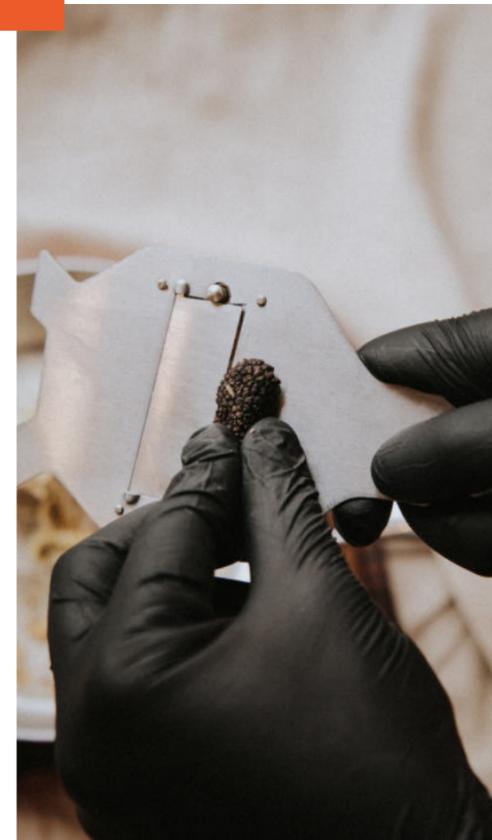
Features

An interesting part of the project is that the business model of the marketplace consists of three sections – B2C, B2B, and B2C. The dotted part in the figure is responsible for that piece implemented on the original client's website. For the project, we execute migration by moving all data from the old website to the new one and expand it with unique customizations – roles and entities for sections #2 and #3.

As for section #2, we add the option for users to become New Chefs. They should sign up in the front-end, go through a moderation process, and get approved by the administrator. The feature of New Chefs being able to create and populate their own content introduces such a thing to the project as user-generated content (UGC)[7].

Product Staging. It means that all the content that New Chefs add should be moderated to prevent possible malicious and hateful content. There are manual, semi-automated, and automated moderation options, and for this project, the client decides on the manual one which the admin will be responsible for.

Chefs can create masterclasses and workshops in their personal accounts, which is immediately transferred to the moderator, who makes a decision to approve it or not.

A Chef can find a calendar plan with their classes inside the personal account to sort by month, week, and day. They can also see a list of Participants for a specific Session there with an option to add more Sessions, upload customized recipes, etc.

A Chef can create a Restaurant to hold events at. Each Restaurant has specific attributes and descriptions, such as Name, Location, Capacity, Amenities etc. To make the search for Restaurants more convenient and smooth, we integrate the Restaurant list page with a Google Maps feature, where a Participant can change the scale, and the list of the Restaurants in the neighborhood adjusts respectively.

Filters. To provide a quick and easy search for cooking events, we implement custom filtering logic by city, date, price, language, etc. Each event has a webpage, where Participants can find detailed information, add it to the wishlist, see the prices, book a seat, send the course as a present, etc. Each Course has its seating limit, set by a Chef, and when the number of vacant spots on the Course runs out, Participants can sign up for a waiting list.

Payments. We carry out the integration with the Monetico Payment gateway, which is a widely spread and common solution for the French and European market. In addition to paying by card, we make it possible for users to pay offline by cheque through the mail. We also implement the custom feature of hours, which is an alternative currency that allows buying cooking events on the marketplace and can be bought as a package. Participants can also easily and quickly pay in two ways — one-time payment or split into several payments.
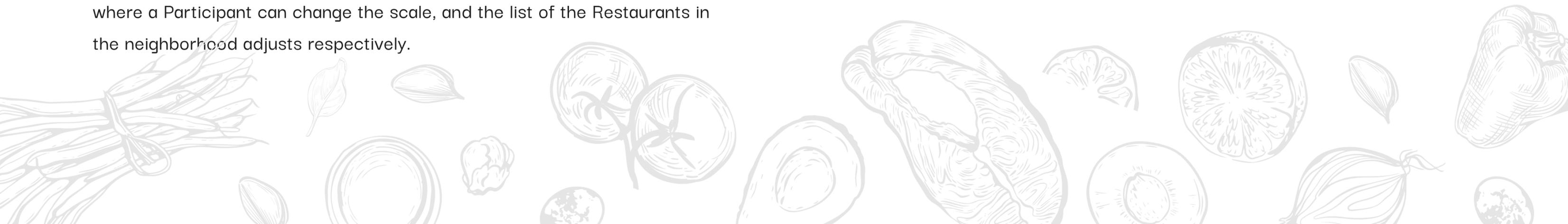
Admin panel. The client's project also includes the role of an administrator who performs a number of business-specific operations in the admin panel. According to the client's requirements, we customize it extra in comparison with the previous one to make it easy-to-use, expand the products and users management sections.

We make it possible to change product information and the list of Participants for a particular event, as well as cancel participation, waiting lists, contact form submissions with a CRM integration, moderation process, gift cards, which can be bought in two ways — for euros and alternative currency (hours) — and have expiration dates, which can be prolonged using another custom feature developed by our team.

Recipes. After a Masterclass is held, each Participant receives a Recipe. It's a list of the ingredients and units of measurement with additional comments on how to cook the dish.

Referral Program. An additional part of the project development is the functionality of a referral program, according to which each logged-in Participant has a link that can be sent to a friend. When placing the first order, both of them receive 10% discounts.

To sum up, we've gone to considerable length on developing features, creating new functionality, and integrating the website with third-party systems for achieving the client's goals.
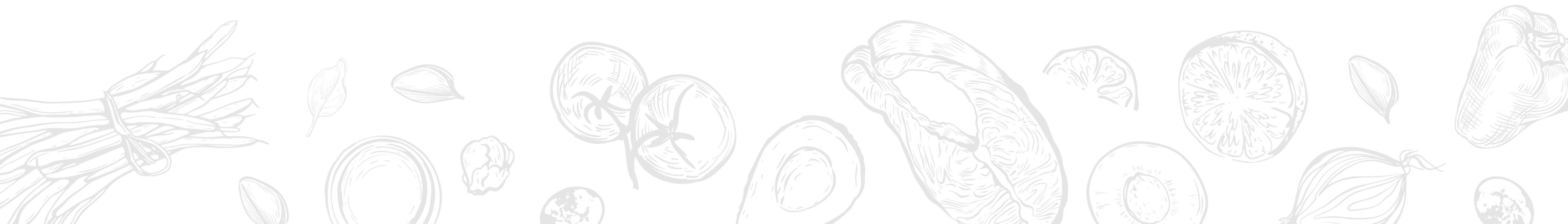
Results

1. Helped the business to widen opportunities and reach new audiences

2. Offered the client several ways to upgrade the existing system

3. Completed a migration from Magento 1 to Magento 2 with the safe transferring of the settings, data, and content

4. Built a marketplace with a range of features & functionalities

5. Implemented several integrations with third-party systems for the website smooth working
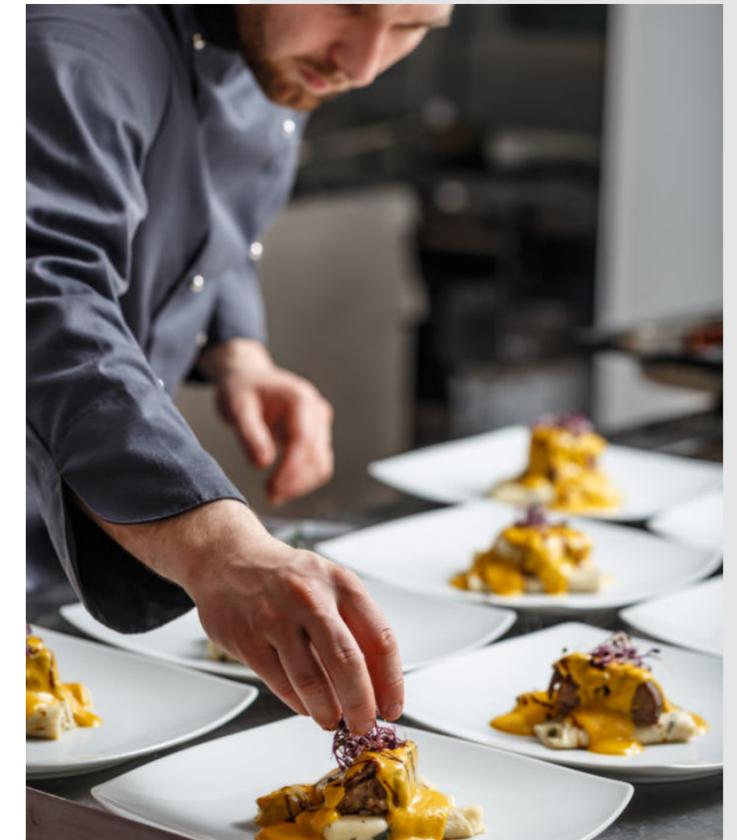
Let's have a chat

Choose the most convenient way of communication for you — write an email or contact us in one of the messengers. We'll discuss your project — provide individual calculations and offer our suggestions on how to upgrade your business.

Email

sales@magecom.net

Phone

+44 2081 44 6420

Office

United Kingdom
102 Wornington Road
London W10 5QP

Messengers

SKYPE

FB MESSENGER

WHATSAPP

TELEGRAM

magecom

Your
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