



INTERNET 101

By Michael R. Geisen

Summer is the Season for Social Media – Don't Miss It

If you're hearing a loud buzzing, it's probably all the chatter about the big social media websites; Facebook (#2), YouTube (#3, also owned by Google), Twitter (#12), MySpace (#17) and others. Considering only Facebook alone, with more than 400 million active users, if it were a country, it would be the third largest in the world, after China and India. So you can see that there is good reason for the chatter. These rankings are from a list of the 500 top websites in the world, provided by Alexa, the web information company. To view the list, go to: www.alexa.com/topsites.

These social media websites can be used to drive traffic to your website and to get people excited about attending your festival. In this edition of Internet 101, I'll share my thoughts on how you can get the most value out of these websites and

why your busy season is a critical time for your social media program.

As we work to continuously improve our websites, we also need to continuously increase the number of visitors. Increasing the number of visitors is critical because the more traffic you have on your website, the more likely you are to increase event attendance and rental of your facilities throughout the year. While there are many ways to increase traffic, developing an active presence on social media websites is rapidly becoming the most cost effective choice.

Social media websites are exploding in growth because they give people fun and easy ways to share their experiences and to interact with each other. Facebook also claims to have over 1.5 million businesses with active pages (www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics), which is no

surprise, since the people are on Facebook, businesses will follow. And these social media websites are growing rapidly; in March, 2010, it was reported that for the first time more people visited Facebook than Google.

Since these websites are where people are spending their time, you can benefit substantially by creating a presence for your business on one or more of these sites. Think of it as opening a store in a mall that is full of people who might attend your festival or event.

After you create your presence on these sites and begin to build your network of fans, followers, friends and/or subscribers, you'll be able to use the tools on the websites to promote your festival and other events or opportunities. All of these websites include great resources for communicating to your social media



community. And you don't have to just promote; be creative with trivia contests, prize drawings, exclusive discounts, insider information and more.

Your busy season is prime time for growing your network of friends in your social media program. As your network of friends grows, you will have more and more people to tell about what's going on at your events. So, it is essential that you plan an active effort to add more fans and friends during festival season, when you've got everyone's attention. Again, be creative by offering incentives to your social media community to invite their family and friends to join. Plan ahead and do this during your busy season, when you have the highest level of participation.

To give you an idea of what can be done, here are a few examples of how

many fans some events have accumulated on Facebook:

Event Name	Number of Facebook Fans
Daytona International Speedway	20,028
Bristol Renaissance Faire	9,303
Minnesota State Fair	81,799
Florida Strawberry Festival	11,762
South by Southwest	67,842

While these numbers may seem impressive, these are just the start. These results are what can be done with an active program to get people to join your social media program. You can do this too by thinking of ways to reward people for joining your social media program such as special offers, drawings, contests, members-only discounts and benefits, etc.

Even without incentives, just by running a good, informative and interactive social

media program and promoting it on your website and in email newsletters, you can see tremendous results. That's how the Minnesota State Fair got 81,799 Fans for their Facebook page since they started it in 2007. Brienna Schuette explained that they use their Facebook page for three primary reasons;

1. gathering feedback and ideas (e.g., what benefits would be of value for Friends of the Fair),
2. monitoring customer service, and
3. promotions. She confirmed that fair time is critical, and estimated that they doubled the number of Facebook fans during the 2009 State Fair.

While posting interesting information to your social media pages and interacting with the community that you create is essential, your social media program should not become a duplicate of your

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website, the purpose of your social media program should be to get people to your website where they can get all the information and buy tickets.

How to Get Started with Facebook

When you're ready to open a Facebook account for your festival or event, you can start here, www.facebook.com/pages/create.php. Once you've created your account, the process of creating your Facebook page is simpler than with MySpace because MySpace offers so many more choices for customizing your page.

One thing that is common to both MySpace and Facebook is that you can control what will appear on your page. Both websites offer a fairly complex range of options for controlling who can post to your page and who can see what. It is worth taking the time to learn how to use these controls because while you do want some interaction, you will need to be able to control what appears on your page.

As with MySpace, try to make your Facebook page interesting and fun; use creative tactics such as drawings, special offers, contests, members-only discounts, etc., to grow your network of friends and then post frequent invitations to visit your website where they can get all the information and purchase tickets. These social media sites can be much more relaxed and informal environments than your corporate website, so you can write in a relaxed voice and be more personal.

For more ideas on how to put your Facebook page to work, try visiting this article, "32 Ways to Use Facebook for Business," on the WebWorkerDaily website, at <http://tinyurl.com/nndm8w>.

How to Get Started with Twitter

Twitter is a website where you and everyone else can communicate with short messages of 140 characters each. Starting with that simple model, Twitter has and continues to evolve into an endless array of options for creating, sharing and acting on ideas, events and opportunities.

Recently, Twitter published Twitter 101 for business, located at <http://business.twitter.com/twitter101>. Twitter is a fairly unusual website, so I recommend at least a quick visit to their tutorial. When you're ready to get started, go to www.twitter.com and click on the SIGN UP NOW button to begin creating your account.

For more ideas on how to put your Twitter page to work, try visiting this article, "62 Ways to Use Twitter for

Business," on the WebWorkerDaily website, at <http://tinyurl.com/naohcn>.

And here are some examples of Twitter accounts.

Calgary Stampede

<http://twitter.com/calgarystampede>

Daytona International Speedway

<http://twitter.com/DISupdates>

Mesquite Rodeo

<http://twitter.com/MesquiteRodeo>

Nebraska State Fair

<http://twitter.com/NEStateFair>

State Fair of Texas

<http://twitter.com/StateFairOfTX>

How to Get Started with YouTube

To get started with YouTube, go to www.YouTube.com and click the SIGN UP button to create your "Channel." You'll be able to create a profile, upload videos, customize the design of your Channel, and more.

Since YouTube is all about video, when you're ready to start your YouTube Channel, the main objective will be to use a decent video camera to start recording relatively short (15 seconds to 3 minutes) videos that communicate the fun, excitement and history of your festival or event.

The more creative and interesting you are, the more popular your YouTube Channel will be. Interview people having fun, interview children, interview entertainers, let people tell their stories about the booth they've had at the fair for 25 years or about the pie they baked. Make it engaging. Make a lot of videos. And as you post videos you'll quickly see which work and which don't and that will help guide you to new, more successful videos.

Alternatively, if you read the last edition of Internet 101, you may want

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to save yourself a lot of time and give people an opportunity to get involved by inviting people to submit their own videos. If you put some thought into how you invite people to create and submit videos, you can really add some fun to the process. For example, you could suggest interesting topics, create a competition, or ask them to collaborate with each other. You could even put some incentive behind it with awards or prizes. You will likely be amazed at how much work some people will put into creating fun, interesting and valuable videos for you.

For more ideas on how to put your YouTube Channel to work, try visiting this article, "34 Ways to Use YouTube for Business," on the WebWorkerDaily website, at <http://tinyurl.com/m7qh49>.

Here are a few examples of YouTube Channels.

South by Southwest

www.youtube.com/user/sxsw?blend=2&ob=4

California State Fair

www.youtube.com/user/californiastatefair

Indianapolis Motor Speedway

www.youtube.com/user/nowfilmfestival

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

www.youtube.com/officialRODEOHOUSTON

Los Angeles Marathon

www.youtube.com/user/LosAngelesMarathon#p/u

How to Get Started with MySpace

To get started on MySpace, as with almost any other web project, you would do well to spend some time to see what others have already done – examples are provided below. When you're ready to create your MySpace page, go to www.myspace.com, click on SIGN UP, in the top, right corner and complete the account application form. As you complete the application, you'll see that some fields, such as gender, are not applicable to a festival, event or other businesses. Go ahead and fill in the application with reasonable answers and you'll be able to manipulate how this information is displayed (or not) on your profile later.

You'll be prompted to upload a photo; you could use your logo or come back to this step later. Next you're prompted to add friends. Building your social media community is one of the primary objectives on all social media websites because as you grow your community you can use the social media communication tools to promote your event.

Now that your account is created you can customize the design of your page, add more friends, upload photos, videos and music, communicate with your friends, and more. Some of the best friends that you can add to your network

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are your entertainers because they probably already have MySpace pages and hundreds or thousands of friends in their own networks. So, when you connect with an entertainer who has thousands of friends, you gain visibility with their large network of friends.

Here are some examples of MySpace pages.

Coachella

www.myspace.com/coachella

Allen County Fair

www.myspace.com/allencountyfair

California State Fair

www.myspace.com/californiastatefair

Strummercamp Festival

www.myspace.com/strummercamp.festival

Sydney International Music Exhibition

www.myspace.com/sydneymusicexpo

Wisconsin State Fair

www.myspace.com/wisconsinstatefair

Other Social Media for Building Your Internet Program

There are many other social media options for building your internet program, some you may have heard of such as Flickr and Picasa, which are great websites for sharing large quantities of photos. Another interesting website is Wikipedia; if your event doesn't have a listing in this online, collaborative encyclopedia, maybe it's time to start one.

As you work on building your online community, don't forget to promote your Facebook, MySpace or Twitter pages on your website. One very handy way to do that is with a free widget offered at www.sharethis.com (see example, below) which people can use to email the page to their friends, post to their blog or to their social media page.

While Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and other social media sites do not charge you to use their service, there is definitely a cost in time and effort, especially if you want to see results. Since your presence on these websites will represent your

festival or business, you should consider hiring a knowledgeable professional who is familiar with the features of the website, will put in the required time, and has the technical and creative resources to create and operate a program that will do a good job of presenting your business.

In closing, I encourage you to continue to work to enhance and enlarge your internet program, especially during your busy season. The internet is becoming increasingly important in our every day life and festivals and events need to embrace the internet to communicate, to do business and to compete successfully.

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www.myspace.com/mgeisen
www.linkedin.com/in/mgeisen
<http://twitter.com/mgeisen>