

INTERNET 101

Recommended Internet Strategies for 2011

By Michael R. Geisen

http://www



This is off season for many IFEA members, which means it should be peak season for reviewing your internet (I decided to stop capitalizing “internet” because I’m seeing more media organizations come to their senses. Also, I don’t capitalize “web” or hyphenate email or write website as two words. And now, back to our regularly scheduled program.) program to find the lowest cost strategies for making better use of the internet in 2011.

By no means is this intended to be a complete list of ideas, so if you would like to discuss these options or others further, please feel welcome to contact me.

By making decisions early and taking action to implement those decisions, you can enhance your internet program in ways that will deliver benefits for years to come, so let’s get to work.

Make Sure You’re Using What You’ve Already Paid For

For most of us, the internet and all its bells and whistles is pretty new. Even if you’re already tweeting, texting and Facebooking, there is so much going on in the wonderful world of the internet that there’s always more to learn. Also, you’ll need to give some thought to the people who will be visiting and using your website and to others who may work with you that may need to work with your internet program. I recommend starting with an inventory of the tools you’ve already paid for and an honest assessment of whether you’re getting the most out of them. If you have a Constant Contact account (or Exact Target, or our Ntelligent Suite Communications Module), are you actively recruiting subscribers, sending interesting email newsletters to promote events and evaluating the success of your campaigns? Do you have a Facebook account with more cobwebs than status updates? Is the content on your website almost as old as your organization?

Because these new internet marketing strategies usually require some adjustment, they often go unused while we continue to use less effective, less efficient and more expensive traditional media, because it’s familiar and comfortable. The off season is the best time to educate yourself and your staff, get training if available, and possibly reassign responsibilities (some people adapt to new

methods better than others). Ask yourself and your team questions like the below examples, and do your best to find good answers well before the busy season.

- Are you updating content on your website (text, photos, videos)?
- Are you keeping your website’s event calendar full of interesting information for events well into the future?
- Have you considered developing a version of your website for smart phones? Are you measuring traffic on your website? (Google Analytics and Alexa, both free, are recommended)
- Are you creating and sending out good email newsletters that drive traffic to your website and increase sales?
- If you’re sending out email newsletters, are you evaluating their success and adjusting future newsletters?
- Are you using your ecommerce system to sell tickets and merchandise?
- If you have a Facebook (or Twitter, YouTube, MySpace) account, are you posting comments, photos, videos regularly?

At the very least, use this off season to come up with at least three ways you can make much better use of what you’ve already got in place – then set concrete objectives so that you actually improve performance of your internet program this year. If you follow through on this one recommendation, the benefits will likely be substantial.

Also, if you find yourself wondering where the budget for your internet program will come from, if you also have a budget for traditional media (print, TV, radio, outdoor, etc.), I believe that is a likely place to look because those marketing channels are less efficient, more expensive, slower and generally cannot be tracked for performance. I’m reminded of an interview I saw recently where Marc Andreessen, founder of Netscape and

other very successful tech companies and an active tech leader in Silicon Valley, was asked what he thought newspapers should do to survive. He said they should stop printing newspapers now and work on developing an online business model. I think Marc’s right; we all need to be looking for opportunities to replace traditional marketing and business methods with online versions that usually are more effective and less expensive.

Website Redesign

When people start thinking about improving their internet program, redesigning the website seems like it is the most popular place to start. In my opinion it’s also the most difficult part of improving an internet program because there is almost no way to measure the benefit of a redesign which can cost thousands of dollars and take a lot of time and effort.

In making your redesign decision, I recommend that you ask yourself and other decision makers in your team if the design of your current website adequately communicates the fun and excitement of your events (design and content) and if people can easily find the information they need (navigation). If the consensus to either one of these questions is no, the next question is how much of a redesign is needed. A redesign can range from a makeover of the current site to a complete redesign. If you decide to go with a complete redesign, when you develop the budget for that project, don’t forget the cost of transferring content from the old website to the new website; this can be a significant cost in itself.

If your website needs a complete redesign, you can substantially reduce that cost if you are able to find another website that can act as a model or template for your new website. By using another website as a template for your new website you can substantially reduce the project cost because it is a lot of work to create a new design.

We work with a lot of fairs, which do not generally compete with one another, so it usually won’t matter to anyone if the websites of two different fairs have very similar designs. This is the thought behind our Small Fair Internet Program, where our clients pick from two design templates for their new website – yielding substantial savings because they are selecting a design rather than having us create a new one for them.

Typical costs for a complete redesign of a website ranges from \$5,000 - \$20,000, depending on the size of the website and how creative you want to get in “communicating the fun and excitement” of your fair. If you decide on an update of your current website, that cost will typically range from \$2,000 - \$10,000.

Email Marketing

In a previous edition of Internet 101, I said that I get evangelical (almost) about email marketing. I still feel that way. In my opinion, there is no other marketing method that comes close to delivering the return on investment that you can get from email marketing. At a cost substantially lower than traditional marketing methods (print, radio, TV, outdoor), you can create a good looking, engaging email newsletter, send it to the email inbox of hundreds or thousands of people who have asked to hear from you, get nearly instant information about how many people viewed the email, clicked on the links in the email, and visited your website or purchased tickets. With email marketing you can know how many dollars of revenue are generated for each marketing dollar you spent. Traditional media cannot give you that kind of information; I know, I worked for an ad agency for four years.

If you don't have an email marketing program, there are many, many service providers to choose from, including:

- Constant Contact
www.constantcontact.com
- Exact Target
www.exacttarget.com
- Ntelligent Systems
www.ntelligent.com

For 2011, a good goal would be to ensure that you plan an email marketing campaign to promote your events and, if you rent out your facilities, a separate



campaign to promote those events. To make sure that these campaigns are carried out, I highly recommend that you develop the email newsletters during the off season and then transmit at the appropriate time during the fair. All email marketing services provide the ability to create email and test it and then leave it in place until you're ready to send. Most systems also give you the option of scheduling the email transmission, so that you can have a fully automated campaign in place before you get busy. If you wait to create your email campaign until you're busy, it probably won't get done.

Another critical goal would be to develop an active program to gain new sub-

scribers. This can include prize drawings, discount coupons, contests, etc., which are promoted through your website, email marketing campaign and your offline marketing. I have seen good promotions generate over 10,000 – 20,000 new subscribers.

Ecommerce

While internet programs can be expensive to build and operate, they should also generate a substantial amount of direct and indirect revenue. For Festivals and Events, the most likely way to generate online revenue is ticket sales. For other IFEA members, selling products and services are most likely. For now I'll focus on ticket sales.

There are at least several dozen providers of software solutions for online ticket sales. Doing your research is essential because the wrong choice can lead to unnecessarily high costs, system failures and reduced ticket sales.

Here are some tips for your ecommerce program:

- Have you been doing a good job of promoting online sales? There are many options for driving traffic to your website including contests, prize drawings and email marketing. With advance planning, a relatively inexpensive promotional campaign can make a big difference in sales revenue.
- If you're getting started with online ticket sales, the first step would be getting referrals for ecommerce systems from other colleagues who are already selling tickets online. This will help you find potential ecommerce vendors and define what you need for your ecommerce program.
- If you already have an ecommerce program, are there new options or system upgrades that are likely to deliver a good return on investment?
- Avoid contracts more than two years in length; this is a competitive business and technology is always changing so a



contract that is a good choice this year may be uncompetitive three years later.

- Ensure that you will own and have full access to the customer information generated by the ecommerce system, especially email addresses. If your provider does not want to provide this information, it's probably time to switch.
- Be conservative in system design, especially if you will be redeeming barcoded tickets at entry gates. For example, relying on wireless connections to relay critical data can lead to service interruptions. It may be worth the investment to use hard wire connections. There are plenty of stories of ticketing systems that stopped working on the event's busiest day because the wireless internet connection didn't work.
- Phasing in a system over two or more years can give your patrons and staff more time to get used to the system.

Following is a list of some of the companies that offer ecommerce solutions to the event industry:

- Admit One Products, www.admitoneproducts.com/eticket_solutions.php
- Etix.com, www.etix.com
- Interactive Ticketing, www.interactiveticketing.com
- Ntelligent Systems, Inc., www.ntelligentsystems.com
- Ticketmaster, www.ticketmaster.com
- TyTix, Inc., www.tytix.com

Social Media

Unless you've been on Pluto, which isn't even a planet anymore, you've heard about the popularity of social media websites like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube and more. To put it simply, the decision about what to do with social media really boils down to resources. While social media accounts are usually free, it can take a lot of time (t = \$\$\$) to work with them. So, while social media can be a great benefit, if you have to decide between enhancing essential aspects of your internet program like your website, or producing an email marketing campaign(s), or managing your ecommerce system, then I recommend putting a minimal effort into social media and focusing on those other, more important fundamentals.

At least a minimal effort would be a good idea though because even a minimal effort can give you the opportunity to start learning how the websites work and you can start building your community of social media friends.



Text Message Marketing

You would have to have been even farther out than Pluto, maybe out in the Kuiper Belt, to not have noticed that text messaging is amazingly popular and it's getting more popular all the time. This quick and easy form of communication is also a great way to promote your fair or business.

The best use of text messaging that I have seen so far are Text Message Marketing campaigns (TMM) with a range of activities such as scavenger hunts, prize drawings, discounts for admission or special events. With a good promotional campaign, your TMM campaign can significantly increase attendance and add a whole new dimension of fun activities for your customers.

Other Ideas

Internet programs can vary widely, so there are a lot of other ways you can enhance your internet program for 2011, including:

Sponsor programs; these can generate revenue to help pay for your internet program in return for visibility on your website and/or email newsletters.

- A mobile version of your website. This would be formatted for easy reading by smart phone users and would only include essential information from the full version of your website. (I recommend ensuring compatibility in this order of priority; iPhone, Droid, and Blackberry).
- Converting books, such as a guide to the fair, to downloadable PDFs or online magazines.
- Ensure you have a good way to measure website traffic - I recommend Google Analytics and Alexa.

- Develop a moderated, online forum where people can share their experiences in written, photo and video form.
- Online surveys can be a great way to collect marketing data.
- Bring more business functions online, such as competitor registration, employment applications and registration and application forms for other events.

In closing, I encourage you to continue working to enhance and enlarge your internet program. The internet is becoming increasingly important in our every day life and organizations need to embrace the internet to communicate, to do business and to compete successfully.

Michael R. Geisen is the CEO at Ntelligent Systems. Ntelligent Systems is a team of marketing, web development and customer service experts working together with one goal in mind: to help organizations leverage the Internet as an effective communications medium. If you'd like to contact Michael, he can be reached at: michael@ntelligentsystems.com or 714 425 4970. www.ntelligentsystems.com. While this edition of Internet 101 covered a lot of ground there is still plenty to discuss so if I may be of service, please feel free to contact me.

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