

Web Secrets for Fairs

Building a web site for your fair is only part of your fair's Internet marketing plan. More important than a good web site is a way to drive traffic to your site and to keep visitors coming back.

The best way to keep people coming back is to offer changing content. Make a plan to place fresh content on at least a monthly basis during the off season and weekly or even daily when you get closer to your fair.

Where are some sources of content? Every press release you send to the media should also be posted on your web site. As soon as your entertainment is announced, post it on your site with a method of obtaining tickets. Create a section on the site listing your commercial vendors, creating a 'virtual' fair that will drive more traffic to their booths.

Here are some suggestions of what information you should put on your web site.

- Entertainment Schedule
- Calendar of Events
- Facilities Available
- Competitive entries, online premium book
- Your fair's history
- Media kits and press releases
- Merchandising and ticket sales
- Links with other fairs and organizations

There are lots of ideas and links that you can use to create content, track visitors, manage email lists, and improve your fair's web site. Most of these companies offer their basic services for free and all have expanded service packages that range in price depending on your individual needs.

www.martechsys.com

MarTech Systems, Inc.

MarTech Systems, Inc. is the leading producer of software for fairs. We have applications for competitive entries tracking, livestock show and sale, event management, and box office and gate admission ticket sales. We also offer consulting services to help fairs integrate computers, software, Internet and wireless technologies into their business.

www.bcentral.com/services.asp

Microsoft's Bcentral site

Microsoft took several web traffic building sites and rolled them into one cohesive service. Many of the services are free, but you can purchase expanded options for low monthly fees. I recommend their Fastcounter (www.fastcounter.com) as an easy to use web counter. Their listbuilder (www.listbot.com) will let you create and manage email discussion lists. Link Exchange (www.linkexchange.com) will help you create banner ads and trade them with 450,000 websites world wide. Other services, like Position Agent and Submit It will analyze your web sites position in the search engine and help you increase search engine visibility.

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Email lists are an excellent way to keep people coming back to your site. Visitors that subscribe to your lists are interested in hearing about the activities going on your grounds. You should be using email lists on a regular basis to disseminate a calendar of events and make general announcements. I recommend Listbot as it makes email list subscription and management very easy. The basic service is free and its expanded service is only \$90.00 a year. There are other email lists, such as www.egroups.com, but I've found Listbot to be the easiest to use.

www.webmonkey.com

The Web Developers Resource

Have you been picked to head up the web site development at your fair because you're the youngest or most computer literate? Never mind that web technology changes on a daily basis, and the last time you've taken an HTML class was in 1996. Webmonkey has an excellent set of tutorials that will get you on track creating excellent, usable web sites. Remember that flashy graphics may look nice, but usability is what matters.

www.websitegarage.com

The Web Site Garage

Tune up your site with this free service. Web site garage will analyze your site and give you a diagnostic on size, loading speed and compatibility. The site also has a GIF reducer that will compress your images for faster load times.

www.cast.org/bobby

The Center for Applied Special Technology

In talking about usability, we should also remember to design pages that are accessible by people with disabilities. Bobby will analyze your web site and make recommendations that will improve its accessibility. Approved sites may display the Bobby logo.

www.searchbutton.com

If you've got more than a dozen pages on your site, then you should integrate a searching feature. Searches help people find what they are looking for fast, and a search feature will tell you what your visitors are looking for and what your visitors can't find on your site. Searchbutton is fast, customizable and doesn't require a lot of work to implement. Plus Searchbutton has a lot of excellent reports that tell you how visitors are using the search function. Install a search feature and you will find that it will be one of the most used functions of your site.

www.webtrendslive.com

Webtrends web traffic analysis

You've got the site, the content, and the traffic. Now we need to figure out where is everyone coming from and how are they using the site. Webtrends traffic analysis tools puts a little bug on each of your web pages. As people move through your site, Webtrends tracks the information and reports it back to you. These tools give you qualitative information to help you build a better web site.

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www.mapblast.com/myblast/mfsFree.mb

Mapblast free online maps

Don't just tell people where your fair is located, show them with an online map from Mapblast. Mapblast will even furnish driving directions to make it easy for anyone to find your fairgrounds.

www.accuweather.com/adcbn/affiliate/linking

Become an Accuweather Affiliate

Put a weather forecast on your fair's web site and you could make money. Accuweather's affiliate program lets you create custom weather forecasts for your location, and if your site generates enough traffic to the Accuweather web site, then Accuweather will send you a commission check.

www.ofoto.com

Build an online photo album

An excellent way to build content on your site is to create an online photo album. Invest in a digital camera and take pictures at your fair. Upload the pictures nightly to the online photo album to share with your visitors. Ofoto will even let visitor order reprints directly from the site so you don't have to be bothered by reprint requests.

www.adobe.com

Adobe Acrobat Reader

The Adobe portable document format (PDF) has become the standard in which documents are distributed over the web. The reader is free to download and the distiller, the application that makes the Acrobat documents, only costs \$199.00. The advantage of the Acrobat reader is that people can easily view and print your documents, and your documents will look just like the originals. The Acrobat PDF is an excellent way to distribute your premium books and entry forms. This document is available in PDF format on our web site at www.martechsys.com/consult.htm. Adobe's also got lots of free web services available at: www.adobe.com/services/main.html.

We talked about creating content, building traffic and tracking visitors, but let's not forget that the best way to build traffic is to link with other sites. Look at linking with high quality sites like festivals.com, iafenet.org, and wfanet.org. Of course link with neighboring fairs and your community's Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Finally, don't forget about building traffic by placing your web address on all your advertising. Work with your local Internet Service Provider's for sponsorships in exchange for commercial booth space.

These links and suggestions are only the start to building a great web site. As I find more free services I'll pass them along to you. Also feel free to pass this information to any other fair needing help with their web site. You can also find a printable copy of this 7document on the MarTech Systems, Inc. web site at www.martechsys.com/consult.htm.

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