Web-based Marketing – A new ERA

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Reference: http://www.iisd.org/sdcn/webworks/marketing/web.htm

The World Wide Web itself offers one of the most dynamic and wide-reaching vehicles for marketing your Web product/service. This section will address three main Web-based strategies, as well as a few miscellaneous tools that do not necessarily fit into one of these categories. These strategies include: using your own Web site, cross-linking and banner ads.

Making the most of your own Web site

In order to show site visitors what you have to offer and convince them to use it, you should incorporate some of the following elements into your Web design. Most of these elements should be found on your main page, seeing as that might be the only page your visitors see if they don't like what they find there.

Navigation by audience – In order to make it easy for users to find information which is relevant to them, you could create additional navigational buttons or sections such as "for teachers," or "for the media." This will allow you to speak directly to your most important target audiences. However, this should be seen as an additional entry point to content, not as the primary information architecture for the site.

Highlights section – To give users an incentive to return to your site, create a section that features new content. This will give them the sense that they do need to come back because the site is frequently changing.

About this Web site – While you may want a page or two to describe your organization and its projects, you may also want to explain the purpose of your Web site. This way, users will get a quick idea of site-uses. If they have to figure this out on their own, they might get frustrated and leave, perhaps never to return.

Fun, games and prizes – You may not want to distract people from the seriousness of your Web content, but there are a variety of playful incentives that you can use to draw people to your site. Once they are there, they will hopefully look around some more. Examples of this include quizzes, games and giveaways (i.e., books or CDs).

Search engines

As a Webmaster of a CSO, you have to be aware of ways to promote your site that don't require too many resources from your organization. Search Engines are among the most popular tools that people use to search something on the Web, and most of them are free! So, the key is what you do to ensure that search engines are noticing your Web site.

How do search engines work?

Although search engines are really a general class of programs, the term is often used to specifically describe systems like Alta Vista (http://www.altavista.com) and Excite (http://www.excite.com) that enable users to search for documents on the Internet. Typically, a search engine works by sending out a spider to fetch as many documents as possible. Another program, called an indexer, then reads these documents and creates an index based on the words contained in each document. Until the page has been indexed by the search engine, the information that the spider finds is not made available to the public. The indexer reads the documents from top to bottom, so what it looks at first is the primary determination of relevance.

Improving your exposure on the Web

There are a few things that you can do to ensure that search engines will index your site in the best way, so that you can be found easier in the enormous information sea that is the Internet. You can start writing your text using key words where you can, especially in the first paragraphs. Other things to have in mind are:

Titles

Title tags are most important since they are what search engines look at first. Using clear and relevant titles will help your site get a better ranking on search results. Including key words when possible on titles will also contribute to getting found easier (e.g., use "Public Participation Module" instead of "PP Module"). Besides, the title tag is what appears as the name of the link when viewing the results of a search, so be as clear as possible in order to give users an indication of where the link will take them.

Meta-tags

Meta-tags are special HTML tags that provide information about a Web page. Unlike normal HTML tags, meta-tags do not affect how the page is displayed. Instead, they provide information such as who created the page, how often it is updated, what the page is about, and which keywords represent the page's content. The meta-tags that most search engines use to correctly index Web pages are keywords and descriptions. As search engines read from top to bottom, meta-tags should be positioned high up on the page:

Keywords

Using relevant keywords and descriptions that reflects your content will help you to get the "right" people going to your Web page. For example, if your Web page is about international environmental law for sustainable development, using "development" as a key word might bring to your site a user that was looking for "economic development." Following are some tips that will help you to take advantage of key words and descriptions:

Use unique and uncommon words (this way, you will have less competition)

Place the meta-tags before other tags (like Javascript, etc.)

Use multiple-words phrase instead of single words (e.g., "international environmental law" instead of "international, environmental, law")

Use different meta-tags in different pages (or at least in the main page of major sections)

Submitting to directories

Submitting your site to directories will increase your presence on the Internet, as well as help you to get better rankings on search results. There are several directories where you can submit your site for free. You should submit it to the most popular and general directories like Yahoo! (http://www.yahoo.com – regional Yahoos also exist), Google (http://www.google.com), Altavista (http://www.altavista.com), Excite (http://www.excite.com), among others, but also to portals specialized in your area, like the Global Development Network (http://www.gdnet.org), ELDIS (http://www.eldis.org), AmbienteOnline (http://www.ambienteonline.pt), etc.

A couple of tips:

Submit your site in more than one topic or area

If your site is about an organization that works on environmental public policies for sustainable development, then you might submit it to "Environment," to "Organizations," to "Policy," and so on.

Re-submit your site periodically

Every once in a while you should check if you're still indexed into a directory, and re-submit it if you are not. You should also re-submit your site whenever you make major changes to your Web site.