

# Online marketing gets personal

Targeted sponsorship, exhibitor searches, blogs and forums...Arran Coole explores the opportunities online marketing can offer event organisers

While the debate continues as to whether the internet is reducing exhibition visitor numbers, and only time will tell in the long term, there are very few events not using online technologies to market their events and most are enjoying great success and growing attendance.

Forward-thinking marketers argue that exhibitions and events will continue and thrive because of the need for people to meet and discuss their issues or interests face-to-face, and marketers should ensure their event objectives reflect this. The visitor's time is precious and events continue to provide an excellent opportunity to meet a large number of contacts in one location.

And what are these objectives? Well hopefully to attract visitors that are stimulated and engaged and to connect them with the right people. For exhibitors it is to meet qualified visitors, with a specific interest in their products or services.

Online technologies provide excellent opportunities for this need to personalise communication, which influences our actions on psychological, emotional and rational levels.

Exhibitors can sponsor the areas of the event website relevant to their target

market, emails to specific sectors, online registration forms, seminar modules etc. Exhibitors can also take advantage of well segmented registration data, not just segmenting through demographics but buying patterns, buying behaviours and associated product interests. Although this is not strictly an online medium it will drive a personalised offering increasing the case for a potential visitor to register in advance and actually turn up!



Arran Coole: 'Year-round communities'

Visitors can readily search and select exhibitors, product releases, seminars and feature areas pertinent to them or their business, and there are online elements available so the visitor can plan their day and make the most of attending. Individuals can get in touch with other registered visitors or contact the exhibiting companies they are interested in before the event. Exhibitors can recoup their exhibiting investment

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before the event itself through leads gained online.

Organisers can create industry or audience communities with year round news, developments, information and supplier directories. These sites can include blogs and forums which encourage commitment by the users and a feeling of exclusivity. Forums can also facilitate group communication and enhance the reasons for returning to site – and registering for the next event in that sector!

All this can be tracked and analysed through quantitative reports leading to well-informed strategic and tactical planning, and to feedback to exhibitors and sponsors adding to their ROI calculations.

Online marketing is a tool not to be dismissed – go ahead and explore the possibilities, create a community and provide compelling reasons for suppliers and visitors to take part in your event!

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