

Online Amusement:

Latest Internet Trends Being Utilized by Amusement Parks

By Andrew Hyde

During the construction of Millennium Force in the winter of '99-'00, Cedar Point did something that had not been done before – they kept an online construction journal. The park's construction manager wrote journal entries once every few weeks. It wasn't until a few years later that the idea of an online journal for an amusement park actually took off.

Holiday World took the journal idea and applied it to not just construction but the every day actions in the park. The HoliBlog was born. Simple to run and relatively cheap, blogs help to create a "sticky" website that draws people back repeatedly. In 2005 Cedar Point built on the HoliBlog idea and launched OnPoint-- a behind-the-scenes blog.

"We wanted to introduce our own way to both interact with guests of Cedar Point and show them what they don't normally get to see during the off-season," explained Tony Clark, a public relations representative at Cedar Point and one of OnPoint's bloggers." In general most people log on to get the information they need and then don't revisit. "Our blog encourages multiple visits each week. We have seen a major increase in unique site visits and return visits since the introduction of OnPoint."

Webcams

Webcams are small, unobtrusive cameras that relay images to the internet on a regular interval. Not only do they allow guests to get a sneak peek at a certain area of the park from their home computer, webcams give people a reason to visit a website again. Although webcams can be used to show general areas of a park they are often included on a park's new project webpage, where construction progress can be viewed.

Parks large and small are using webcams. Knoebels Amusement Resort, a small family park in Pennsylvania, has a webcam to keep guests up-to-date on the construction for their latest ride-the Flying Turns. Holiday World has also used webcams to promote new rides.

Listen up

Parks guests are listening to parks more than ever thanks to another internet trend: the podcast. A podcast is a recorded radio-style show that one can download from the web to listen to whenever they want.

Podcasts, while requiring more of a commitment, provide something few other marketing mediums can: portability. Podcasts are heard not just on computers but in the car, at work and at the gym – places where traditional advertising usually doesn't reach. The key to success

with park podcasts seem to be the unofficial tone. Despite Cedar Point's being an official one, it is not a long advertisement for the park, but rather features behind the scenes information.

The latest trend is to include video as part of a podcast. Cedar Point developed PointCast in 2006, an online video podcast that gives viewers a unique view of the park. Lately, the park has used PointCast as a place to showcase behind the scenes construction videos of their latest ride Maverick.

"We weren't aware of any other amusement park websites that brought an entertaining, behind-the-scenes look on park happenings," said Clark. "We were lucky that we had a new roller coaster to experiment with, and we've received lots of positive feedback on what we've covered so far."

MySpace and YouTube

Perhaps the biggest internet craze in the last few years has been MySpace and YouTube. Both can provide valuable marketing tools for parks large and small. Although both sites are free to use, the challenge comes in making your message stand out in a cluttered digital marketplace.

MySpace, best described as an online networking website, allows users to create their own "space" in which they can post photos, keep a journal, and build a friend list. Creating a MySpace page is a free resource parks of any size can use to connect with their customers on a more intimate level and even become their virtual "friend." According to Comscore research, users spend an average of 225 minutes on MySpace per month making it an extremely valuable outlet to use as a marketing tool.

YouTube, an online website that allows anyone to post and view videos, is another perfect marketing tool. Anyone can register for an account and upload videos for free. It is the ideal place to upload the latest park commercials, promo videos, and things of that nature.

The latest internet trends provide cheap, but extremely valuable, marketing ideas for parks of all sizes. If people are willing to be a park's "virtual friend" or check back often to look at a webcam, chances are extremely high they are going to be more excited to visit that particular park. . . .

For information on starting your own internet marketing program, visit www.inparkmagazine.com, click on RESOURCES.



Cedar Point's Tony Clark and Tyler Adams tape a segment for PointCast. *Courtesy of Cedar Point*