

3 MARKETING YOUR COURSE ON A WEB-BASED COMMUNITY

Uses and benefits of this resource

Trainer resource

- How to use a Web-based community to market a course or other learning event to the best possible advantage. (The principles can also be applied to an intranet site).

Overview

In this resource we shall be covering:

- the advantages of using a Web-based community to market a learning event
- letting people know about the community site
- appealing to different learning styles
- appealing to different senses
- giving potential learners a reason to come to your event
- essential information
- making your community accessible for people with impaired sight
- advanced applications
- a sample of a Web-based community used to market a course.

Materials and resources

- 2 Resource masters:
 - 3.1 *A checklist for appeal!*
 - 3.2 *Making your community accessible to the visually impaired*
- A computer with access to the Internet

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The advantages of using a Web-based community to market your course

3

There are many advantages and benefits of using a Web-based community to market a course or indeed any other form of learning intervention. These include:

- It is free to use – no publishing or design costs.
- It can be viewed by anyone who knows the site exists.
- You can appeal to a wide variety of potential learners by making the community compatible with different learning styles.
- It creates a dynamic interest in your product.
- You can create direct links to and from other sites on the Internet or an intranet.
- Once your community site is set up, you can continue to use it for other activities connected with your event, such as collecting pre-course work, participant introductions, post-course coaching, and so on.

Letting people know about your community site

In *Resource 2*, I suggested that in most cases it would be best to keep your community private. Every rule has its exceptions – and marketing a course is a good example of a Web community that you would keep open, at least to employees and other people that you want to be informed.

Another option is to have all the information about your course on the front page of your community. This front page is visible to anyone who knows the address of the site, whether or not they are a member of the community. This means that people can see the key details of your course with the minimum of effort – it may also entice them to become a member of the community if there is more information on inside pages that non-members cannot access.

Ways in which you can let people know about the address of your community include:

- e-mailing details to potential participants
- including the address on an intranet page (possibly with a direct link to your site)
- publishing details in a staff magazine or other publication
- including details on posters and other forms of advertising
- including details in memos, manuals and other in-house communication
- creating easy access to the community in your in-house learning centres.

Appealing to different learning styles

Using a website or your intranet to market a course or other learning event gives you the opportunity to be as creative as you like. Unlike many other forms of communication, such as memos, you can easily appeal to all different learning styles.

The work of Honey and Mumford (see *Further reading* on page xvii) shows that there are four main ways in which people learn, and that many people have a strong preference for one or two of these ways. Honey and Mumford's learning styles are listed below, together with ideas for how the content of a community marketing page can appeal to those styles.

Learning style – Activist	
Description	Likes activity – exercises, games, role plays, and so on.
How to appeal	Mention all the activities that the course has to offer. Promote the elements of interaction. Have an exercise that can be downloaded or a questionnaire to complete.

Learning style – Reflector	
Description	Likes to sit back and observe. Appreciates being able to draw their own conclusions.
How to appeal	Give them something to read. Pose questions such as 'Have you ever wondered ...?'

Learning style – Theorist	
Description	Likes to understand how and why things work. Needs to know the background to things.
How to appeal	Give an outline of the course content, with aims and objectives. Mention any theories or principles that underpin the course.

Learning style – Pragmatist	
Description	Likes learning that is practical and can be put into action straight away.
How to appeal	Talk about the practical applications of the learning. Include examples of benefits that have come from previous courses.

Appealing to different senses

As well as preferring to learn in different ways, people also tend to react to different sensual stimuli, predominantly visual, auditory or kinaesthetic (emotions or activity). Once again, using a community gives you an ideal opportunity to appeal to all of these senses.

Sense – Visual	
How to appeal	Make use of background colour, different font styles, pictures and images.
Sense – Auditory	
How to appeal	Use the written word. Use descriptions, quotes and testimonials.
Sense – Kinaesthetic	
How to appeal	Talk about activities. Use images of people taking part in activities. Use emotional language such as 'believe', 'experience' or 'transform'.

Giving potential participants a reason to come to your event

All good marketing has a 'hook' – a reason why people will want that particular product or service. Some of the best hooks for marketing learning events are:

- practical things that the event can do for you
- testimonials or examples of the ways in which previous learners have benefited from this event
- the social interaction of the event
- the opportunity to network with colleagues.

Essential information to market your course

Bearing in mind all of the above considerations, there are some essential pieces of information that potential participants will need to know. These include:

- dates and times of the event
- location
- cost
- duration
- who it is aimed at
- who will benefit, and how
- the aims, objectives, and, possibly, an overview of the content
- the style of the event
- what is involved in terms of pre- and post-course work
- how to apply or be nominated to attend
- how it fits in with other events or initiatives.

Making your community accessible to people with impaired sight

The Internet provides a marvellous opportunity for people with all sorts of disabilities to access information, learning and instant communication. In a survey in 2000, however, the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) found that very few websites are accessible to people with impaired vision. With just a little common sense and thought you can ensure that your Web-based community is as inclusive as possible.

The RNIB has produced some guidelines which are summarised in **Resource master 3.2 Making your community accessible to the visually impaired**. A full copy of the RNIB report can be obtained at www.rnib.org.uk/digital.

Advanced applications

As you become more technically experienced at setting up Web-based communities, you will be able to experiment with more advanced content and applications. These include:

- the use of audio clips (sound bites)
- the use of video clips
- the option to download certain activities or information from other sites
- the inclusion of links to and from other related sites
- the inclusion of direct links to you or the training administrator to book a learning event.

Follow the link groups.yahoo.com/group/marketingyourcourse to see an example of a Web-based community used to market a course.

The screenshot shows the Yahoo! Groups interface for the group 'marketingyourcourse'. At the top, there is a banner for 'the BIGGEST SALE in Internet history' with a 'Shop now' button. Below the banner, the group name 'marketingyourcourse' is displayed, along with a 'Join This Group!' button. The page is divided into several sections:

- Left Sidebar:** Contains navigation links such as Home, Messages, Chat, Files, Photos, Bookmarks, Database, Polls, Members, Calendar, and Promote. It also includes a legend for user roles: a star for Owner, a star with a slash for Moderator, and a smiley face for Online.
- Center Content:** Features a 'Description' section with a large image of hot air balloons. The text describes the group as a resource for marketing courses. Below the description is a 'Most Recent Messages' section, which currently shows 'No messages for this group.' At the bottom of the center content is a 'Group Email Addresses' section listing contact information for the group, including post message, subscribe, unsubscribe, and list owner addresses.
- Right Sidebar:** Contains 'Group Info' (Members: 1, Founded: Feb 21, 2002, Language: English) and 'Group Settings' (Not listed in directory, Restricted membership, All messages require approval, All members may post, Archives for members only, Email attachments are permitted).

Resource 3.1 A checklist for appeal!, gives you a checklist that you can follow to make sure that your marketing page is as appealing as possible.

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A checklist for appeal!

<p>Appeal to learning styles</p>	<p>Activist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mention activities and interaction <p>Reflector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include reading material, pose questions <p>Theorist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline aims and objectives • Sources of information <p>Pragmatist</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical benefits
<p>Visual</p>	<p>Colour Font Pictures</p>
<p>Auditory</p>	<p>Descriptions Quotations</p>
<p>Kinaesthetic</p>	<p>Activities Emotional/active language</p>
<p>Give them a reason to come</p>	<p>What's in it for them What they will gain</p>
<p>Essential information</p>	<p>Dates Times Location Cost Duration Who is it for? Who will benefit? How? Aims and objectives Style How to apply</p>

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Making your community accessible to the visually impaired

Backgrounds and text

- If using a coloured background, choose one which is a single, solid colour, rather than textured or patterned.
- The colour of the background does not matter as much as the contrast between the background and the text.
- Avoid italic text.
- Do not make text too large or too small – standard (medium) text sizes, which can be altered by the visitor to the site, are preferable.
- Avoid underlining text.
- Avoid sentences written in capital letters.

Colour combinations which enhance clarity

Black and any light colour	White and any dark colour
Light blue-green and dark purple	Light blue-green and dark red
Light green and dark purple	Light green and dark red
Light green and dark violet	Light yellow and dark purple
Light yellow and dark blue	Light yellow and dark violet
Light orange and dark blue	Light orange and dark violet

Colour combinations which reduce clarity

Light red (pink) and dark green	Red and purple
Yellow and white/light grey	Lavender (light purple) and pink

Images

- All images (pictures) should be accompanied by a simple text description of the image.

Continued ...



Making your community accessible to the visually impaired

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Links

- All links should contain enough text to make it clear where the link will take the visitor.
- Links should not appear directly next to each other.

Tables

- Use tables with care, as the access technology used by some visitors to your community may not be able to make sense of them.

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