

club life:

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WHEN LOBBYING BECOMES PERSONAL
ANTI-GAMBLING EXTREMISTS GO TOO FAR

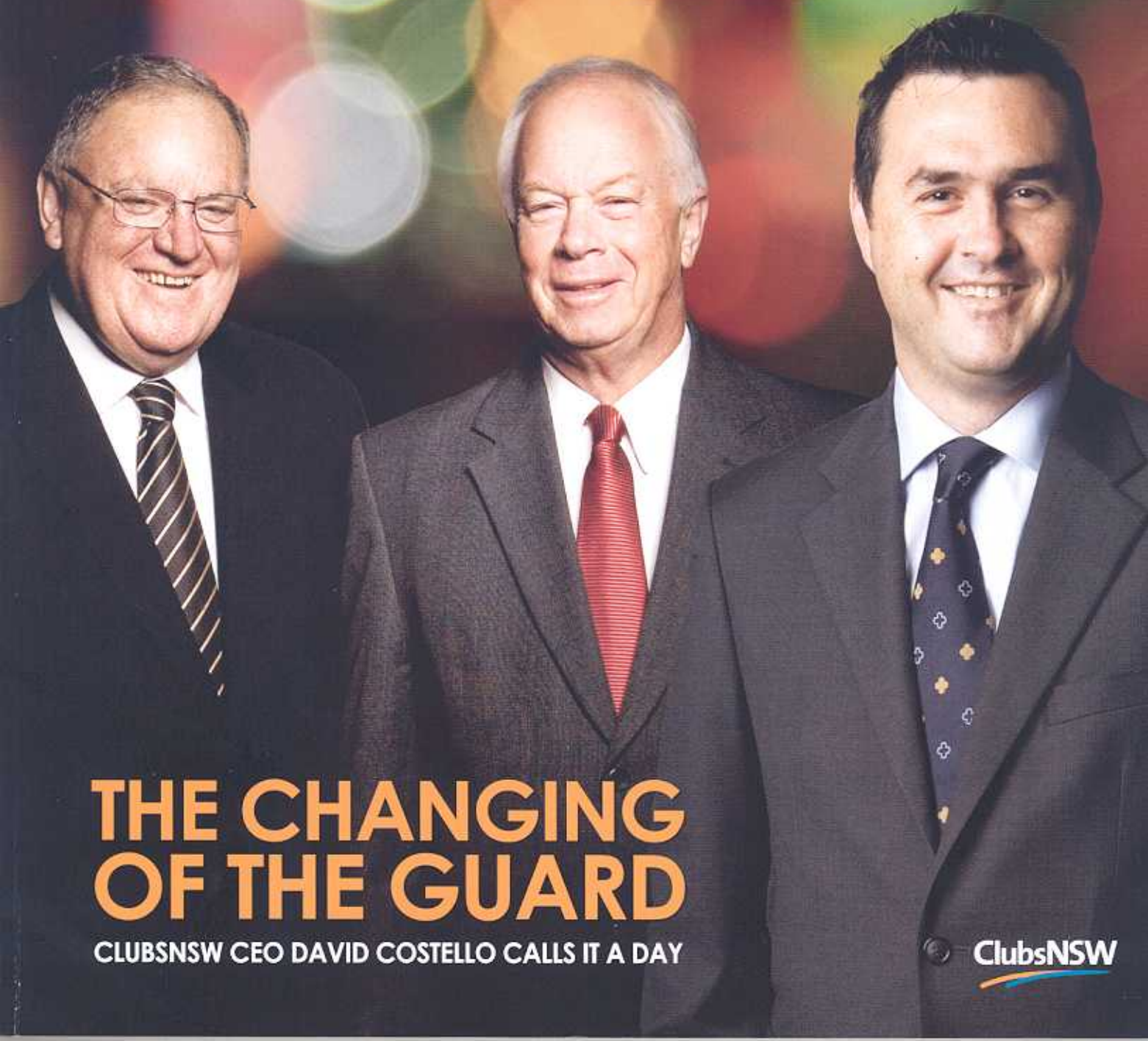
THE OFFICE ROMANCE
CAN LOVE AFFAIRS TURN INTO LAWSUITS?

CREATING THE CLUB EXPERIENCE
EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING YOUR VENUE

IS 21 THE INDUSTRY'S NEW BLACK?
AUSTRALIA'S DRINKING AGE UNDER REVIEW

THE COMMISSIONING
OF PRE-COMMITMENT

IS POLICY DESIGN & EVALUATION DRIVEN
BY ANALYSIS OF ALL AVAILABLE OPTIONS?



THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

CLUBSNSW CEO DAVID COSTELLO CALLS IT A DAY

ClubsNSW

Tourism: There For The Taking

BY OLIVIER BJÖRKSÄTER-BLEYLOCK



In Paris, there is an association called *Paris Greeter*. Its purpose is the same as the successful *Big Apple Greeter* program set up in New York in 1992 to overcome the city's image problem: Dangerous, expensive, and overwhelming. Friendly residents would go out of their way to help out-of-towners feel welcome, showing them around their neighbourhoods.

In Paris, it's the people who are perceived to be the problem. So, the aim of the *Paris Greeter* is to overturn the long-held prejudice about Parisians: That far from being welcoming, they are rude. The association relies on Parisian volunteers to take visitors to their favourite places, sharing their love for the city, as well as tips and addresses. In the website's own words: "Our volunteers...are enthusiastic and friendly; they know Paris well and give their time and knowledge so that you discover their city as a friend would do." At last, brave Parisians are rising to the challenge of changing their deplorable image abroad!

Such greeter programs are designed to help sustain and ultimately boost the tourism market. Closer to home, and while we don't possess such programs (do we really need them anyway?), we're beginning to see more material emerge about the rising importance of the tourism market for many businesses, including clubs. And as you'd suspect, those clubs actively marketing to the tourist industry are seeing increased patronage for food and beverage, function and conference hire, and entertainment.

While the benefits from tourism are self-evident, there's little information available on how clubs can build their share of the tourist market...well, that's all changing as new emerging opportunities begin to present themselves. However, the critical starting point is for clubs to accept that change is commonplace nowadays in order to survive and what may have been accepted practice previously may now be irrelevant for current trends – that is, clubs still categorising themselves only as a local community-based facility rather than part of a larger network that extends across the State. That kind of thinking is over.

Once you see your club from this viewpoint it's easy to recognise other clubs' members as your visitors and tourists. And the good news is that these visitors are familiar with clubs and don't need to be sold on the value and wide-range of facilities on offer. It's obviously a valuable asset to have a potential base of people who are already club users and looking to use clubs outside their locality from time to time. When the potential of the visitor market is recognised, clubs should identify what it is they're offering to them. For smaller clubs, it may be the bar and an excellent family-oriented restaurant, while larger venues may have access to sporting facilities, entertainment, and venue hire to help celebrate any occasion.

Historically, many clubs have under-estimated the value of their facilities. Venue hire has been neglected and

facilities have sat idle chiefly due to the fact they've not been actively marketed to prospective users effectively. Venue use comes in many forms – weddings, conferences, meetings, cocktail parties, product launches, school formals, and much more. In fact, much of this business is traditionally directed to hotels as they have marketing teams solely for such venue facilities. Those clubs that are thriving in this area have already caught on, but for those that haven't fully grasped the potential, it's often worthwhile considering appointing a specialised marketing person who can co-ordinate this revenue source – dealing with everything involved to sell your facilities and secure the bookings.

After your club decides to attract the visitor/venue market, how do you go about building this new income? Mainstream media including press, radio, and television is expensive and really only works to promote brand recognition of national consumer products and retailers. Local advertising may be efficient at informing the community about what's happening from week to week but it isn't seen by the target audience you want to reach. Well, there are other effective ways to reach the tourist and venue-booking audience. The first step is to segment your prospective visitors. Depending what's near to your club, you can look at people on holidays, travellers passing through, interstate and overseas visitors, people visiting friends and family, and corporate offices. Your marketing campaigns should be developed to appeal to these individual segmentations.

Above it all, whilst there are countless ways to promote your club's facilities from glossy venue packs through to exhibiting at trade shows, probably your most important marketing tool is your website. Many businesses frequently decide that they need a website but have little clue as to why or how to implement a proper web strategy. In addition, many websites today fail to make the site part of an overall marketing and customer service strategy. If a website doesn't explain a company's core mission, what purpose does it serve? Websites should be an extension of company values and outlook and if they fail to do that, they run the risk yet again of being pointless. Furthermore, the five factors critical to making an effective website are content, design, navigation, functionality, and vitality – get these fundamentals right and your club is on its way to securing future business. A final fundamental mistake is a lack of research and planning. Did you know that more than 90% of websites that are developed, whether a re-design of an existing site or something from scratch, are designed without ever talking to the customers, the end-users who actually use the site? So, why not break from the trend and talk to your members as well as potential customers. You may be surprised by what you discover.

So, now you have a top-notch website on offer, the next step is to increase your web presence as well as increase your viewer numbers. This is where search engine optimisation will help. Just like winning in a race, when it comes to search engine optimisation, winning is all about being at the top of the search listings. But the race for pole position is becoming more important as paid search reaches saturation and new technologies, such as personalised search, come on-stream. Many businesses still want to be number one, according to most search agencies, but the truth about the advantages of coming top of the pile depends on your business objectives. If you're brand focused and aiming to become a massively high-traffic website, then being at the top is important. If sales are your goal, coming top will have no value if none of those clicks are turned into sales. However, there's still an affinity in the mind of the user that equates coming top of the list with quality.

However, there is another way. de Groots Media has fast become an important provider of viewers seeking hospitality information. For over 14 years they've supplied reliable information online about restaurants, hotels and resorts, venues, and now registered clubs. But if you don't believe me, you can check out their high-ranking Google stats yourself with over 600,000 viewers every month. Essentially what it means is that people searching for club information will be directed to de Groots Media's range of websites (at a fraction of the cost too) where they can discover the facilities your club has to offer. Viewers can search to find exactly what they need – be it a club with great food or somewhere to hold their wedding reception, and if you have what they're looking for, they can simply click through to your club's website for further information. But the best news is that de Groots Media has facilitated millions of dollars of business to hospitality venues that have used these services for many years.

But wait...it gets even better. The latest initiative for de Groots Media is a partnership with Tourism NSW, the New South Wales Government's official tourist website www.visitnsw.com.au. It's actually one of the first calls for viewers seeking tourist information about the State, and is now running all of de Groots Media's restaurant and venue information. This is an excellent opportunity for clubs to promote their dining facilities to visitors coming to New South Wales, and ultimately will help generate more business for your club as well as extend to generating more income into the local community. So, what is your club waiting for? To become part of this fantastic initiative and boost your business, contact de Groots Media today on **02 9211 6088** or jump online and visit www.degrootsmedia.com.au ■